

THE STRAITS TIMES

Sport Spurs to play in S'pore C10



Top of the News
Monster dad
jailed and caned
A8

World Fashion
icon Karl
Lagerfeld
dies A12



Business
Growing
appetite
for
fitness
C1



Supermoon brightens sky on Lantern Festival

Visitors to Bedok Jetty yesterday evening were in for a special treat when a supermoon – said to be the biggest and brightest of the year – appeared in the sky. The moon lit up the sky at about 7.30pm, but a bout of cloudy weather later kept it hidden until about 8.30pm, when it reappeared. Ideal locations to see the moon included those with a clear view of the eastern horizon, such as East Coast Park and Labrador Park. The supermoon coincided with the Lantern Festival yesterday, which marked the 15th and final day of Chinese New Year celebrations, or Chap Goh Meh. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

[SEE HOME B3](#)



Huawei CEO puts up strong defence of firm

Huawei Technologies' founder and chief executive Ren Zhengfei has pledged not to share any customer information with the Chinese government, in an interview with CBS News that aired yesterday. Asked if Huawei had shared data with Beijing, Mr Ren said: "For the past 30 years, we have never done that. And (for) the next 30 years to come, we will never do that." He also said that the company did not have a back door to share customer data with Beijing without his knowledge. "It is not possible," he told the American broadcaster, saying if there were such an opening, the United States would have uncovered it already. On Monday, he said in a BBC interview that Huawei would not undertake any spying activities, and that it could shift its business investments to other countries amid an ongoing US pressure campaign.

[SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A4](#)

Budget addresses cost of living concerns, says Heng

He highlights help for households, stresses that economic transformation is necessary

Linette Lai
Political Correspondent

It is important to the Government that the cost of living is kept affordable, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said yesterday as he spoke at length on the various measures to help households cope. He highlighted how families in the lowest 20 per cent by household income get \$4 of benefit for

every dollar they pay in taxes, and even those in the middle get \$2 of benefit per tax dollar. On top of that, primary and secondary school education is "almost free", and when children enter institutes of higher learning, subsidies range from 75 per cent to 90 per cent, he added. And having a strong Singapore dollar, importing goods from all over the world and fostering competition among local firms are further

ways in which the cost of living is kept within reach, Mr Heng added. Meanwhile, the \$6.1 billion Merdeka Generation Package will ease healthcare costs for seniors. During the dialogue on Channel NewsAsia's Ask The Finance Minister programme, Mr Heng also stressed that transforming Singapore's economy will not be easy, but it must be done now to avoid "hitting a brick wall a few years down the road". "I know it is not easy for us to just restructure, but my concern is that if we do not act now, we will be storing up problems for the future," he said. He was responding to a question

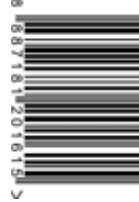
READ MORE
Reactions to Budget 2019
[TOP OF THE NEWS A6&7](#)

about how the lowered foreign worker quota in the service sector could affect businesses. Mr Heng said that Singapore has a choice between two roads, and that if it takes the easy road, it will end up hitting a brick wall. "I know it is difficult, but if we go through this difficult journey, I think we will come out stronger," he said. The quota was one of several an-

nouncements Mr Heng made during his Budget statement on Monday, in which he outlined measures to help Singaporeans with healthcare costs and other expenses, and support for firms and workers to thrive in a changing environment. During the dialogue, which was televised live, he also fielded questions on whether this year's Budget could have included measures to support more groups of people or addressed topics such as housing. He reiterated several times that it is not possible for one Budget to "hit 10 targets at one time" or "tackle A to Z". Instead, each Budget seeks to address different priorities, he said. "We have to see the Budget from year to year and look at how it is building up over time... Every year's Budget builds upon previous years' Budgets," he said. In his Budget speech, Mr Heng said the overall budget deficit for the 2019 financial year is expected to be \$3.5 billion, but the Government has, over its current term, accumulated a sufficient fiscal surplus to fund it. Asked how he planned to spend

the surpluses, he said some come from "unexpected developments". "We cannot plan our Budget on the basis that there will be some good luck, because there will also be years where it is the other way round," he said. He added that at the end of this term of government, any surplus will be locked into past reserves, which are invested for Singaporeans. This Net Investment Returns Contribution is the largest component of the Government's revenue, he said. "It is a way for us to use it in a much more sustainable way to flow back for future users," he said. "It doesn't mean that, we have this surplus, so therefore let's go splurge it tomorrow."

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10

must-reads
for today

1 Trump sued over wall
Sixteen US states have launched a court challenge against the Trump administration's decision to declare a national emergency to obtain funds for building a wall along the United States-Mexico border.
WORLD A16



People outside City Hall in Los Angeles protesting against US President Donald Trump's national emergency declaration. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

2 Addressing cost of living

Having a strong Singapore dollar, importing goods from all over the world and fostering competition among local firms are ways that the cost of living is kept affordable, said Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat. He was speaking at a dialogue session, where he fielded questions on whether this year's Budget could have included support for more people.
TOP OF THE NEWS A1

4 Strain on India-China ties

India's ties with China could come under renewed pressure amid a backlash over a suicide bombing attack on its forces in Kashmir last week that has reignited tensions with Pakistan. Following the attack, at least two trade bodies have called for India to limit its ties with China, which is close to Pakistan.
WORLD A10

5 Upgrading security sector

From wage hikes to a stiffer penalty regime for errant officers, the security industry is bracing itself for a major transformation. But buyers of security services need to support these changes, says Security Association Singapore president Raj Joshua Thomas.
OPINION A17

6 Book for pre-schoolers

A 21-page picture book, Start Small Dream Big Caring For Others, has been launched for pre-schoolers to teach them simple everyday actions to care for their family members, teachers and friends, the community, as well as animals and the environment. Available in four languages, the book will be distributed to all My First Skool centres.
HOME B1

7 Cameras not in use: SIA

Passengers on some Singapore Airlines planes have noticed small cameras attached to the in-flight entertainment system and were concerned they were being monitored. However, SIA has given the assurance that the cameras are "permanently disabled and cannot be activated on board".
HOME B2

8 Focus on the long term

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said the 2008 global financial crisis illustrates just "how interlinked economies and financial systems are". He added that the need to focus on the long term is going to be greater for the property sector.
BUSINESS C2

9 Michelle Wie aims for No. 1

Former golf wunderkind Michelle Wie (right) turns 30 this year and feels she has yet to reach her full potential. After returning from wrist surgery, the world No. 32 American is aiming to become world No. 1 for the first time, and a successful defence of the HSBC Women's World Championship at Sentosa next week will help her cause.
SPORT C7

10 Design fest next month

The sixth edition of Singapore Design Week is on from March 4 to 17. It features many free events and some ticketed talks and workshops. A new addition this year is Street of Clans, a festival in Bukit Pasoh Road which focuses on the heritage clan houses there.
LIFE D6

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VIDEO

Ben Davis' NS case

Fulham player Ben Davis has defaulted on his national service commitments, the Ministry of Defence said on Monday. Here is more about the 18-year-old Singaporean's case.
<http://str.sg/davis>

VIDEO

Budget 2019 and you

Join Straits Times columnists in their first look at the latest measures announced in Budget 2019, including the Bicentennial Bonus and the Merdeka Generation Package.
<http://str.sg/talkbudget>

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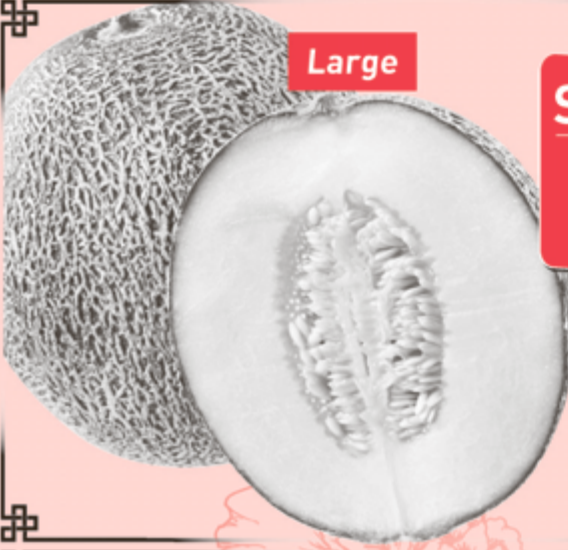
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Huawei founder slams US efforts to blacklist firm

He says the world cannot do without 'more advanced' tech, vows not to allow spying

BEIJING • The founder of Chinese telecoms giant Huawei has hit back at US efforts to blacklist the company, saying defiantly that the world cannot do without Huawei and its "more advanced" technology.

"There is no way the US can crush us," Mr Ren Zhengfei said in an interview with the BBC. "The world cannot leave us because we are more advanced."

Mr Ren, 74, also denounced as "politically motivated" the December arrest of his daughter, Huawei chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou, who is accused of violating US sanctions against Iran and faces an extradition hearing in Canada next month.

"We object to this," he said. "But now that we have gone down this path, we will let the courts settle it."

The normally media-shy Huawei founder has been forced to step into the limelight in recent months as the company has come under increasing pressure over espionage concerns and the US-led campaign to persuade other countries to ban its technology.

US prosecutors are also charging Huawei with stealing trade secrets, saying that it offered rewards to employees for stealing technology from other rivals.

Mr Ren shrugged off the growing pressure.

"If the lights go out in the West, the East will still shine," he said.

"America does not represent the world. America only represents a portion of the world."

"Even if they persuade more countries not to use us temporarily, we can always downsize and become smaller."

However, he said that allowing spying was a risk he would not take.

"The Chinese government has already clearly said that it won't install any back doors. And we won't install back doors either."

"We are not going to risk the disgust of our country and of our customers all over the world because of something like this."

He added: "Our company will never undertake any spying activities. If we have any such actions, then I will shut the company down."

Signs that the United States' efforts to convince its allies to shun Huawei technology could fall through are emerging.

British intelligence concluded that security risks posed by using Huawei's 5G equipment can be managed, The Financial Times reported on Monday.

An unnamed source said: "Other nations can make the argument that if the British are confident of mitigation against national security threats, then they can also reassure their public and the US administration that they are acting in a prudent manner to allow their telecommunications service providers to use Chinese components."

New Zealand is also in talks to minimise the security risks posed by using Huawei equipment in 5G infrastructure instead of excluding it entirely.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said yesterday that its security bureau was discussing Huawei security concerns with Spark, the domestic telecoms carrier that had been barred from using the Chinese firm's equipment last year.

She added that the company had never been ruled out from potentially participating in the country's 5G rollout.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

News analysis

Pushback expected from telcos across the world over Huawei ban



Irene Tham

Tech Editor

The United States has been on a mission to prevent its allies from using 5G mobile systems supplied by Huawei Technologies for fear that China could use its equipment for espionage.

But pushback is expected from telcos around the world. This is because Huawei not only sells equipment which is said to be about 10 per cent cheaper than its rivals', but also has widespread "lock-in" to its technology for a cheap and quick migration to 5G.

For these telcos, not using Huawei equipment essentially means tearing out their 4G networks, setting them back by up to two years – too long in the digital age.

Last month, Australia's TPG Telecom offered a glimpse of what such a lock-in arrangement – dubbed "non-standalone 5G" in tech parlance – looks like.

TPG said it chose Huawei as a supplier because the Chinese tech giant offered a simple upgrade path from the 4G network under construction to 5G.

Such an arrangement allows telcos like TPG to use existing 4G equipment to launch 5G services with minimal fuss – mostly software upgrades and a change in antennas.

So when 5G-compatible smartphones are launched this year, telcos will be ready to allow consumers to enjoy the advanced features of these new-fangled phones, including 20 times faster

surfing speeds than what 4G networks offer.

Conversely, telcos would be set back by up to two years if they are denied their fast-track upgrade path, and have to build new networks.

"It will be akin to rolling out a brand new network. And depending on the scale of the roll-out, it could take one to two years before telcos are able to launch commercial services on the new network," said a telco technologist, who spoke to The Straits Times on condition of anonymity.

Huawei is among the main providers of telecom equipment for operators conducting 5G trials in Britain, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Many are under the non-standalone 5G arrangement with Huawei.

In the case of TPG, investments in Huawei to supply its core 4G network started two years ago, with the telco having spent A\$100 million (S\$97 million) of the A\$600 million network construction cost.

"That upgrade path (to 5G) has

now been blocked," said TPG in response to the Australian government's impending ban on Chinese equipment announced last August.

Because of this, TPG halted all mobile network construction in Australia, saying: "It does not make commercial sense to invest further shareholder funds."

Who blinks first in this contest between TPG and the Australian government could influence other countries' policies.

So far, only Australia, New Zealand and Japan have openly supported the US campaign against Huawei.

Experts said billions of dollars could be wasted if the ban becomes more widespread as Huawei is the world's leading supplier of telecom equipment, owning a market share of 28 per cent. Rivals Nokia, Ericsson, Cisco and ZTE each have less than 20 per cent market share.

In fact, Huawei's current entrenched position is linked to its success in locking in long-term contracts.

Some of these contracts were made as early as 2011.

For instance, Globe Telecom in the Philippines has partnered Huawei since 2011 to keep its telecommunications network current. The telco plans to bring the first 5G connections to homes in areas of Manila where there is no Internet later this year.

Mr Ramakrishna Maruvada, a regional telecoms analyst at Daiwa Capital Markets, said Huawei may also not be in a position to secure the needed supplies to build 5G networks. Its key component and system suppliers include American firms such as Qualcomm, Intel and Microsoft.

"Whether the (Huawei) ban would lead to 5G roll-out delays is not clear as yet," he said.

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Huawei's position across the world

BANNED

- United States
- Australia

WARY, BUT NO OUTRIGHT BAN

- Germany
- France
- Poland
- Czech Republic
- Sweden
- Norway
- Britain
- New Zealand
- Canada
- Japan
- Malaysia

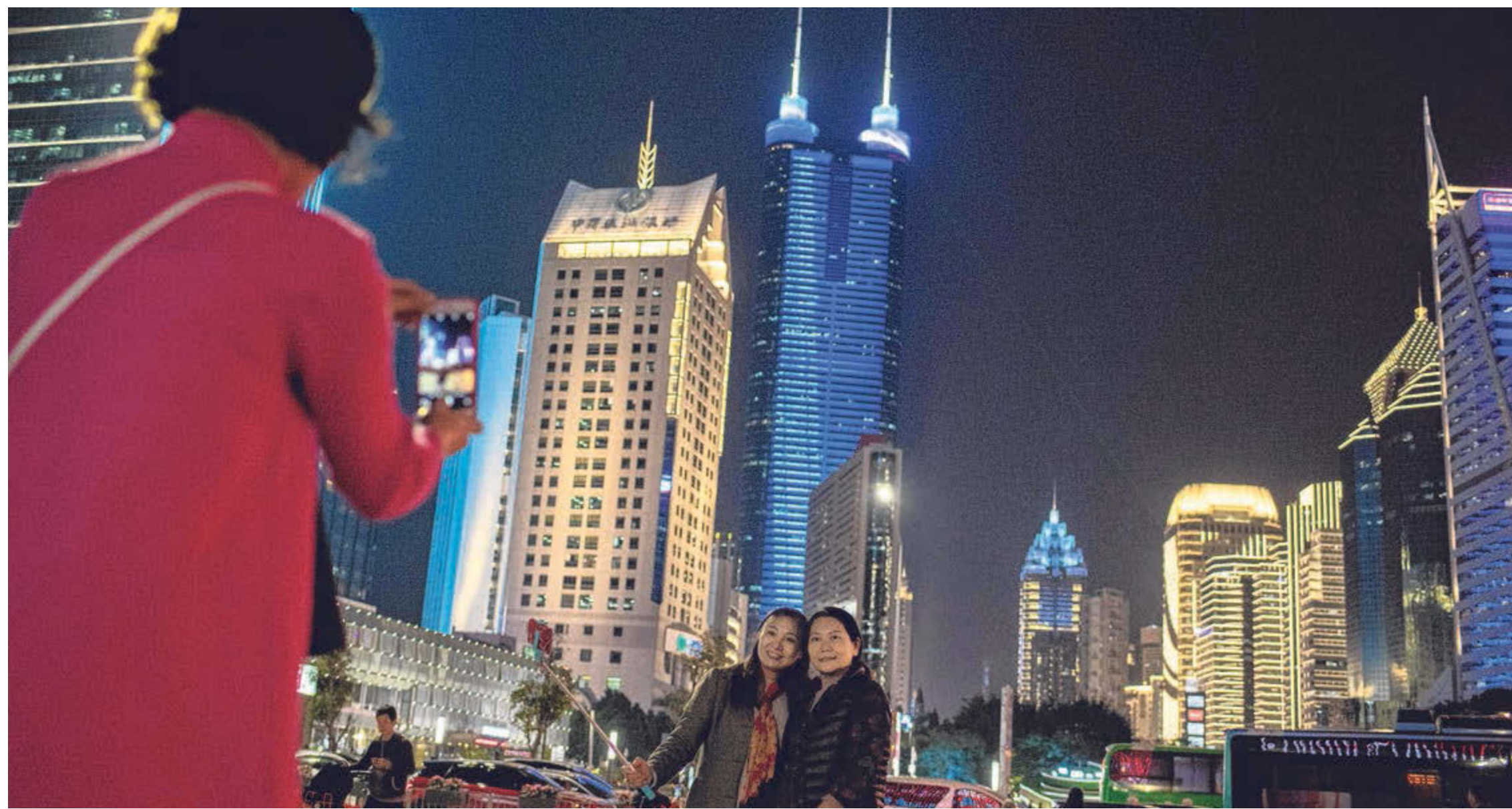


Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei said the arrest of his daughter Meng Wanzhou – the firm's chief financial officer – was politically motivated.



China's plan for its Greater Bay Area singles out four cities – Shenzhen (right), Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhou – as key centres. Observers said the plan presents business opportunities, but could also mean more competition for Singapore.

PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



China's Greater Bay Area plan seen as boon and bane for S'pore

Chong Koh Ping
China Correspondent
In Shanghai

China's grand plan to turn Hong Kong, Macau and nine other nearby cities into a global innovation hub will mean more opportunities for foreign talent and businesses, said observers, while warning that the Greater Bay Area (GBA) could also present competition to cities like Singapore.

A day after Beijing fleshed out an ambitious plan to link a cluster of southern cities while drawing the autonomous regions of Hong Kong and Macau closer to mainland China, foreign entrepreneurs who operate in the area hailed it as a

boon for business.

"The GBA plan is good news for businessmen," said Mr Justin Low, a Singaporean who has been involved in agriculture and property development in Guangdong since 2002.

"In the past two years, we have seen rapid development in transport connectivity – by land, sea and air. For my agriculture business, it helps in bringing my supplies into the GBA more conveniently," he told The Straits Times.

Similarly, Mr Lim Chin Loon, a Singaporean entrepreneur who has lived and worked in Shenzhen for the past 32 years, said the GBA plan fits in well with China's development needs.

Technology and innovation will be the new growth driver in the

next decades of the country's development.

While the GBA plan has singled out four cities – Hong Kong, Macau, Guangzhou and Shenzhen – as key centres, Mr Lim thinks Shenzhen holds the most promise to become the "capital" of the area.

The businessman runs a steel mesh company and also provides automation systems to chicken farms. In the past decade, he has witnessed how Shenzhen has taken the lead in remaking itself, moving away from being a low-end manufacturing hub to become a boom town with a high concentration of technology start-ups and giants.

"The labour-intensive industries have been steadily moving to South-east Asian countries such as Viet-

nam and Cambodia, and replaced by companies making high-tech products," said Mr Lim, chairman of the Guangdong chapter of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce and Industry in China.

For Singapore businesses, he sees "all sorts of opportunities" in the GBA – for the high-tech sector, and the professional services sector such as legal and accounting services.

As the GBA draws more talent, there will be greater demand for commercial activities in the hospitality, transport and food and beverage industries, to name a few.

"(It will be) different from before – you don't have to invest in a very big factory to come in. There will also be opportunities for talents with professional skills, such as en-

gineers, designers or the service industries," added Mr Lim.

While there are clear business opportunities, some warn that the development of the GBA could also mean more competition for Singapore in its efforts to become an innovation hub, as well as for its financial sector.

Noting that the GBA plan – unlike an earlier Pearl River Delta economic zone plan – now includes the two autonomous regions, UOB economist Suan Teck Kin said it could give Hong Kong an edge.

He said the city – sometimes seen as Singapore's rival on everything from foreign investment to tourism – will be boosted by greater flows of capital, people and technology from the mainland.

"When China draws in Hong Kong, it can tap the city's advantages, as well as provide the resources that Hong Kong lacks, such as in technological innovation," said Mr Suan. "Singapore will have to keep an eye on the competition on this front."

Agreeing, OCBC economist Tommy Xie said that in the near term, the new plan will reinforce Hong Kong's role as a global financial centre as well as an offshore yuan clearing centre.

This could draw financing and investment flows away from Singapore, he added.

But in the medium term, the GBA, which is essentially about improving connectivity, is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

"Singapore eventually could share the flows from China and also have a chance to play a role in this," Mr Xie said.

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PROS AND CONS

(Streaming) has very successfully lowered student attrition and improved educational outcomes... But there is also feedback from teachers that students in Normal streams may over time also lose confidence and the mindset of growth and development. The trade-off between customisation and stigmatisation is something we need to recognise.



EDUCATION MINISTER ONG YE KUNG



Education Minister Ong Ye Kung said that to “blur the lines between education streams”, MOE has put in place measures such as subject-based banding, where students in Normal streams can take subjects at a higher academic level, and the Polytechnic Foundation Programme. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN



SCAN TO WATCH
Has streaming run its course?
<http://str.sg/o24r>



Streaming has both pitfalls and benefits: Ong Ye Kung

It has improved outcomes, but students in Normal streams may lose confidence, says minister

Amelia Teng
Education Correspondent

Sorting students by their ability has led to better educational outcomes, but Education Minister Ong Ye Kung acknowledged that streaming may come at the ex-

pense of students in the Normal streams losing confidence.

“The Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced streaming in 1980 to systematically customise learning for students of different profiles,” he said on Monday in a written response to Mr Louis Ng (Nee Soon GRC), who asked in a parliamentary question whether his ministry has studied the effects of streaming on secondary school students’ self-esteem and confidence.

“(Streaming) has very successfully lowered student attrition and improved educational outcomes,”

said Mr Ong, adding that studies by the National Institute of Education have shown that Normal (Academic) students, after spending some years in secondary school, had similar or higher levels of confidence in their studies compared to their Express stream peers.

“But there is also feedback from teachers that students in Normal streams may over time also lose confidence and the mindset of growth and development. The trade-off between customisation and stigmatisation is something we need to recognise.”

To combat this trend and “blur the lines between education streams”, he said, MOE has put in place measures such as subject-based banding, where students from the Normal streams can take subjects at a higher academic level, and the Polytechnic Foundation Programme, for students to join polytechnics without having to take the O levels.

“Our work in this area is ongoing,” said Mr Ong, explaining that factors affecting self-esteem and confidence are complex and multifaceted.

Mr Ng also asked whether there is a pathway for Normal (Technical) students who do well in the N(T)-level examination to take the O levels, beyond subject-based banding as an option.

In response, Mr Ong said that Secondary 4 N(T) students who perform well in the N(T)-level examination can first transfer to the Secondary 4 N(A) stream and take the N(A)-level examination. Thereafter, they can progress to Secondary 5 N(A) and take the O levels.

“This allows students to progressively bridge the gap between the academic demands of the N(T), N(A) and O-level curricula,” he said.

Over the past five years, about 530 students each year have transferred from N(T) to N(A), he said, adding: “They are identified early, based on their secondary school performance.”

Of all the N(T) students who move to the N(A) course, 10 to 20 of them go on to study in the Express track each year, he said.

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Many welcome Merdeka package help to defray healthcare costs

But some who have chronic conditions worry that benefits won't be sufficient

Shabana Begum, Joy Pang and Adrian Lim

While she was not eligible previously, Mrs Kwan Sook Kun, who turns 60 in October, will soon benefit from the Community Health Assist Scheme (Chas).

With Chas, the housewife can enjoy subsidised rates for medical and dental care at participating general practice and dental clinics.

"I will be able to save quite a bit on healthcare expenses, such as on my twice-a-year visit to the dentist," she said.

"I don't have any major health issues currently, but age is catching up with me."

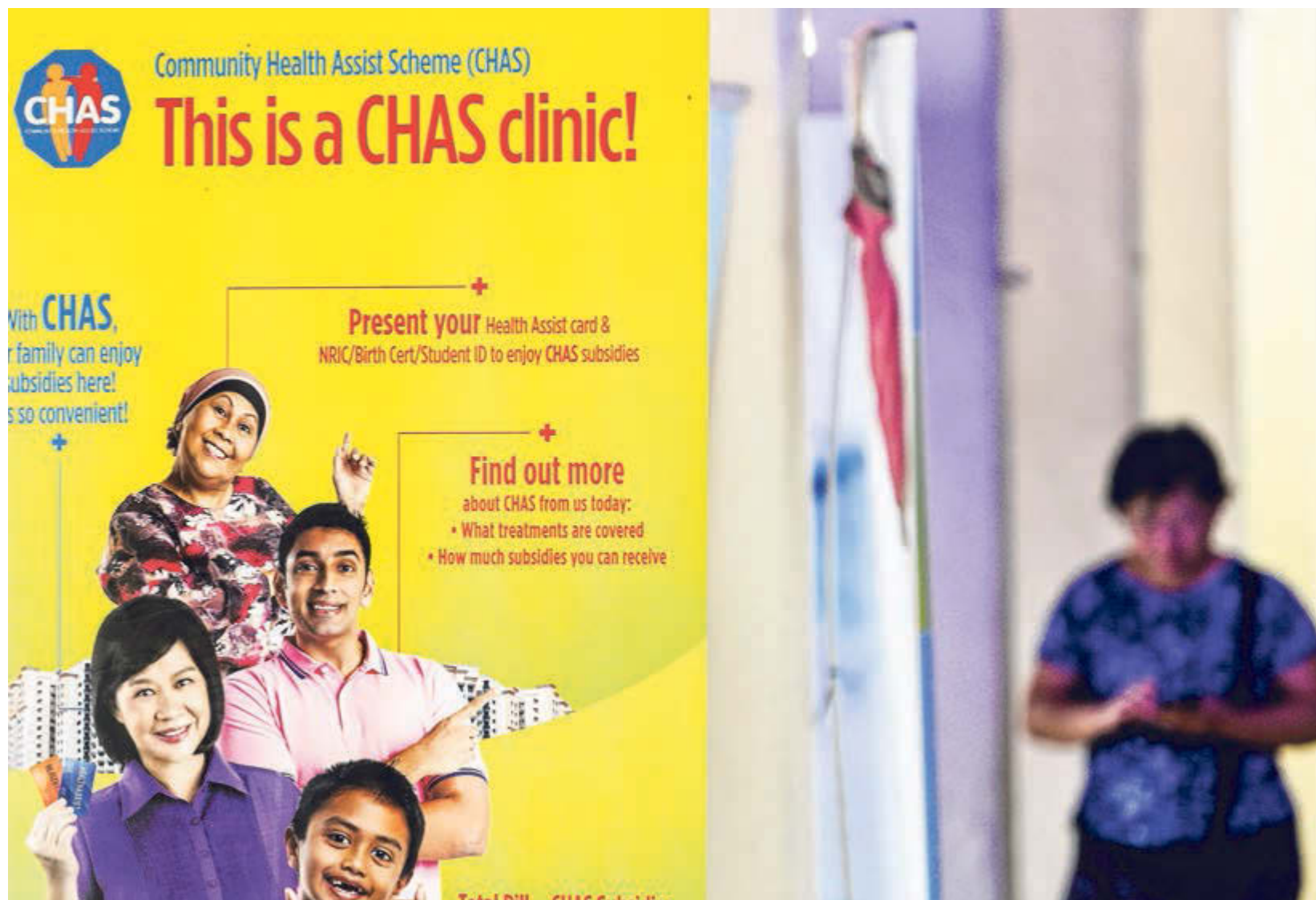
Mrs Kwan had not been eligible for Chas as her household's monthly income per person exceeded the cap of \$1,800.

But this will change with the Merdeka Generation Package, which covers Singaporeans born in the 1950s, and provides them with enhanced Chas subsidies regardless of income.

Details of the package, which also includes Medisave top-ups and additional MediShield Life premium subsidies, were announced on Monday by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat in his Budget statement.

Mr Heng called the \$6.1 billion Merdeka package a "gesture of our nation's gratitude" to the nearly 500,000 Singaporeans that would provide them with greater peace of mind over future healthcare costs.

Mr Roland Soh, 63, a client experience officer at a travel agency, said the Chas subsidies and \$200 Medisave annual top-ups until 2023 provide him with some assur-



The \$6.1 billion Merdeka Generation Package, covering Singaporeans born in the 1950s, provides enhanced Community Health Assist Scheme subsidies regardless of income. Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said it would provide nearly 500,000 Singaporeans with greater peace of mind over healthcare costs. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

ance that his healthcare needs will be supported after he retires and no longer receives company medical benefits.

But some were concerned that the benefits under the Merdeka Generation Package would not be enough to defray the medical costs for chronic conditions.

Mrs Radha Bai Narayanan, 67, said the Medisave top-up of \$200 barely covers a trip to the outpa-

tient specialist clinic.

"Since I have hypertension, I need to go for a check-up twice a year. The \$200 will be used up for consultation fees and medication and, on top of that, I need to pay for blood tests and other procedures," said the senior administrative assistant.

Subsidised patients, however, will find their bills getting smaller, in addition to the top-ups, as the

Merdeka Generation Package will also provide an additional 25 per cent off their bills at polyclinics and public specialist outpatient clinics.

Technician Ahmad Shah, 61, who has diabetes, anticipates that his quarterly visits to the doctor will be less expensive overall.

Besides healthcare benefits, the Merdeka package also gives a one-time \$100 top-up for the PAssion Silver card, which can be used for

activities at the community clubs and transport, among others.

Ms Helen Lim, 65, a childcare teacher, said: "I take public transport to work every day, so I will be able to save some of my salary with the \$100."

Meanwhile, as part of a separate Bicentennial Bonus, 1.4 million lower-income Singaporeans will receive up to \$300 through a GST Voucher cash payout. Working Sin-

gaporeans will also get a 50 per cent personal income tax rebate, capped at \$200.

Housewife Ng Lay Nah, 55, said the \$300 will help pay for necessities such as groceries. "The income tax rebate will be beneficial too. As my husband is the sole breadwinner, every little bit that we can save counts," she noted.

Under the Bicentennial Bonus, older eligible Singaporeans with lower Central Provident Fund balances can also get CPF top-ups of between \$300 and \$1,000.

Madam Roslina Ahmat, a part-time kindergarten teacher, said however that she would have preferred cash in hand. "Money for retirement is important, but I need the money now also to pay for housing," noted the 56-year-old.

Housewife Karen Chua, 42, whose two children are in secondary school, said the \$150 Edusave top-up would go towards paying for school outings, loan of lockers and annual camps. She said the children use about \$100 each of their Edusave money every year, supplemented by cash payments of between \$70 and \$80.

The \$150 top-up will last only 1½ years, said Mrs Chua, who hoped for more support to cover the rest of their secondary school years.

Mr Panneer Selvam, people advisory services partner at Ernst & Young Solutions, said: "As anticipated, this year's Budget was filled with a generous dose of healthcare benefits for all Singaporeans. In particular, the Merdeka Generation can have peace of mind for their long-term care support, which also covers additional subsidies for outpatient care."

Women's advocacy group Aware welcomed the key measures, but said the Budget was lacking in urgency and vision to tackle Singapore's ageing needs.

"Benefits were restricted to one generation, and were mostly one-off. We would have liked to see a more comprehensive package for individuals entering their silver years," said Aware.

The Singapore Democratic Party criticised the Budget for not addressing the high cost of living, unaffordable public housing and "an outmoded education system that does not prepare our children for the future".

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SEE OPINION A18, BUSINESS C2

Economic spending cut, but businesses have reasons for cheer

Ng Jun Sen
Business Correspondent

Businesses might feel a bit short-changed from Monday's Budget given the oodles of help dished out for social spending, but a closer look reveals some key benefits, according to corporate experts.

That first glance shows less spending on economic development compared with past years, and fewer new measures to aid companies and workers. However, experts say this Budget builds on previous ones to help firms grow.

Total spending for the economic development sector, which includes the budgets of the Trade and Industry and Transport ministries, has been cut from \$17.8 billion last year to \$16.5 billion this year.

Around \$4.6 billion will be outlaid over the next three years to fund schemes to help businesses grow and workers lift their skills.

The bulk – \$3.6 billion – will go to assist workers dealing with industry disruptions, while \$1 billion is

earmarked to support businesses.

Mr Joseph Incalcaterra, HSBC chief economist of Asean, said yesterday: "While significant, the \$4.6 billion over three years – or about \$1.5 billion each year – does seem to be on the low side versus pro-business measures in past years, considering how much the industries need to transform."

He compared this with the 2016 Budget, which launched major economic policies such as the \$4.5 billion Industry Transformation Programme to map out transformation efforts for each industry sector, as well as other moves to benefit businesses and workers.

This year's Budget did include new schemes, such as a Scale-Up SG programme to help firms innovate and grow, and an Innovation Agents initiative that aims to put firms in touch with experts who can give insights into innovation opportunities and commercialising technologies.

Another new item is the SME Co-Investment Fund III, which aims to bring in additional venture funding for small firms.



Singapore Business Federation (SBF) chairman Teo Siong Seng said that while there were no broad-based measures for companies this year, it does not mean that the Government is less committed to growing businesses.

The new programmes can ad-

dress a top priority for SBF members – getting more government help in accessing new and critical technology, said Mr Teo.

"We see Budget 2019 as a continuation of the Government's efforts over the years to transform Singapore's economy," he added.

Mr Incalcaterra agreed: "These measures consistently follow the Government's playbook of supporting businesses and workers."

DBS senior economist Irvin Seah said policymakers have opted to "double-down" by expanding existing schemes and making them

This year's Budget was delivered by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat on Monday. Although there is less spending on economic development than in past years, and there are fewer new measures to aid companies and workers, experts say this year's Budget builds on previous ones to help firms grow. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

more effective so that more businesses can benefit.

Mr Seah looked beyond what was budgeted in simple dollar terms to note that the Government has chosen to invest in certain programmes that will not show up on its balance sheets but are "game-changers" of their own right.

He cited the new Enterprise Financing Scheme that combines eight existing funded initiatives under one streamlined programme.

The scheme will also involve the Government taking on up to 70 per cent of the risk for bank loans for young companies, up from 50 per cent now. "This scheme would cost very little to the Government, unless a borrower defaults. It would also reduce administrative costs of having multiple similar schemes," noted Mr Seah.

"You can put in billions into economic policies, or come up with many new programmes. But if companies can't access these funds, it is as good as zero."

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Defence, healthcare, bank stocks likely winners from Budget 2019

Defence, healthcare, bank and grocery stocks are the possible winners from Monday's Budget, analysts said yesterday.

Its emphasis on defence and building a Smart Nation sent defence contractor Singapore Technologies (ST) Engineering to the top of the winners' list for many analysts, with DBS, RHB and CGS-CIMB highlighting the stock.

RHB, which has a "buy" call on the firm, noted: "We view the Government's increased focus on defence spending as positive for ST Engineering, which remains a key innovator

and supplier of defence equipment to the country."

Investors were not so sure, sending ST Engineering stock down 0.27 per cent to \$3.73 yesterday.

The Budget changes to foreign-worker policy are expected to affect several industries.

CGS-CIMB said the impact of tighter restrictions is "slightly negative", but will be alleviated in part by measures meant to help cushion the blow, such as an extension of an automation support grant.

RHB said the cut in the proportion of a company's staff that can be for-

eigners will be "near-term negative" for food and beverage (F&B) players and preferred grocers.

DBS reckoned the quota reduction is marginal for bigger F&B companies such as Jumbo, Koufu, BreadTalk, Sheng Siong and Dairy Farm because they have large employee counts, and that longer-term productivity could improve with government support.

Jumbo closed unchanged at 41 cents and Koufu rose 0.8 per cent to 63.5 cents, while BreadTalk was flat at 88 cents as was Sheng Siong at \$1.08 and Dairy Farm at US\$8.97.

However, the offshore marine sector could benefit from another year's deferment of foreign worker levy hikes.

"We estimate that the move could save Singapore rig-builders \$3 million to \$4 million each in 2019 and 2020," DBS noted. "While this may not be a very significant amount, every bit helps, given the competitive operating environment and plunge in profitability."

RHB said banks will also benefit from a continued push for digitisation among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which could see

more banking going online.

This is particularly in the areas of digital payments and cash management, which should benefit banks in respect of lower cost-to-income ratio and ultimately contribute to higher return on equity.

RHB has "buy" calls on DBS and United Overseas Bank.

DBS closed down 0.4 per cent at \$25.10, while UOB fell 0.27 per cent to \$25.80.

Taxi firm ComfortDelGro Corp is expected to see only a marginal impact from a permanent reduction on the Special Tax on diesel taxis,

which was announced to offset an increase in excise duty on the fuel.

The company will probably pass on the savings from the reduction in the Special Tax to drivers, said DBS and CGS-CIMB.

"We could see about \$7 million in cost savings for ComfortDelGro, but this is likely to be passed through to drivers in rental rebates (up to \$1.70 per day)," CGS-CIMB said. "The positive is the accelerated pace of switching from diesel to hybrid taxi models."

ComfortDelGro closed up 0.83 per cent to \$2.43.

Diesel duty hike too sudden, rebates too low: Cabbies

Others say there are better ways to combat air pollution; higher costs may hit consumers

Christopher Tan
Senior Transport Correspondent

Diesel users upset over the 100 per cent hike in the fuel duty announced in Monday's Budget say there are more effective ways to address air pollution.

Cabby Henry Tay, 48, said yesterday that the immediate increase of 10 cents a litre to 20 cents a litre was too fast.

"They should have given taxi companies more time and more incentives to switch over to hybrid vehicles," he added. "For taxi drivers, we can't do much. We drive what are available."

Mr Tay, who has been driving a cab for 10 years, said his running costs will likely rise by \$4 to \$5 a day, an expense that "can't be passed on to consumers because of competition" from private-hire operators.

He said the upfront diesel tax rebate that taxi companies will pass on to drivers will not be sufficient to offset the rise in running costs. "You give me a deep cut, and then pass me some candy for the pain," Mr Tay said.

Cabby Simon Tay, 64, who drives a limousine taxi, said his cost will probably rise from "\$60 every two days... to \$70 every two days".

He said that as a limo driver, he "can still survive" because he has private clients as well as "jobs from the company".

But others will find the tax increase detrimental, he noted, adding: "Many drivers will quit driving. So, it might be better for those who stay on."

Mr Neo Nam Heng, chairman of diversified motor group Prime, said the tax hike will be felt most keenly by cabbies.

"The impact is quite great," he noted, adding that two-shift drivers will see their daily cost rising by as

much as \$6 a day, "versus around \$2 in refund from the company".

Mr Neo added: "This will, of course, affect drivers' earnings. And it will add to business cost for other companies, such as those in construction and transport."

He said that operators of diesel commercial vehicles should be incentivised to switch to hybrids, adding: "They are the main culprits affecting air quality. The Government can do more on this front. In Japan, almost all the light commercial vehicles are hybrids or petrol."

Business owner Andy Goh, 50, who runs an electrical consultancy that relies on a small fleet of commercial vans, said he is likely to switch to small petrol cars.

"These are more comfortable for our engineers. And they can fold down the rear seats to carry their equipment," Mr Goh noted, adding that the running cost of petrol over time is comparable with that of diesel "because diesel engines are not very efficient with age".

Mr Goh reckons diesel vehicles "will go away" over time.

But operators of heavy diesel vehicles said they do not have any viable alternatives for their fleet and that their additional costs may eventually be passed on to consumers.

Woodlands Transport general manager Roger Wong said full-size hybrid or electric buses are too expensive, while biodiesel supplies are "too few, so we would be wasting time refuelling with that".

Mr Wong also said LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) buses could be viable if there were to be a refuelling network here.

He added that diesel tax rebates will not be able to offset the duty hike, but noted that the impact on consumers "will not be immediate because most jobs are contractual". Rates can be revised only when those contracts are up.

"But for smaller school bus oper-



Cabby Henry Tay said his running costs will likely rise by \$4 to \$5 a day, and the rebate taxi firms will pass on to drivers will not be sufficient. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

Change in retail pump prices		
Due to an increase in excise duty on diesel, please note the following change in retail pump price, effective on February 19, 2019, from 07:00am . The revised gross pump prices, before prevailing discounts, are shown below.		
Product grades	Price change on February 19, 2019	Gross pump prices after price change (\$\$/litre)
Supreme+	No Change	2.540
Extra	No Change	2.210
Regular	No Change	2.170
Diesel	+11¢/litre*	1.840

*The Government of Singapore increased the excise duty on diesel from 10¢/litre to 20¢/litre with effect from 18 February 2019, 1745hrs. The above price increase is reflective of this increase (GST inclusive).

A price revision notice put up at an Esso petrol station in Toa Payoh yesterday, after the diesel duty was increased from 10 cents a litre to 20 cents a litre. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

Impact on fares expected to be minimal

The increase in diesel duty will have a negligible impact on public transport fares.

This will be the case despite the fare formula having a specific component that takes into account changes in fuel and energy costs, observers said, referring to the latest 10-cent increase in diesel duty to 20 cents a litre, which took effect on Monday.

Singapore University of Social Sciences' transport economist Walter Theseira said the excise duty hike "is less than 10 per cent of retail diesel prices", and added that the energy index is "only 10 per cent of the fare formula".

Associate Professor Theseira also said the energy index is split between electricity prices and diesel cost, and this further dilutes the impact of the increase in duty.

"Overall, I would say that the excise tax impact on fares through the formula would be minimal," he said.

The Land Transport Authority (LTA) said yesterday that the various tax rebates announced on Monday to cushion the impact of the diesel duty hike "will not apply to public bus services operating under LTA's contracts".

These include bus services run by SBS Transit, SMRT, Tower Transit and Go-Ahead.

"Separate arrangements will be made with these bus operators under the provisions of the contracts," the LTA said, without elaborating.

Christopher Tan

petrol at the pumps, industry watchers said that the duty hike has narrowed the gap between the two fuels enough to make petrol more commercially viable. This is because petrol vehicles are not subjected to upfront diesel-related taxes.

Annual automotive diesel consumption here has fallen by 17 per cent, from around 360 million litres in 2013 to 300 million litres in 2017. At 300 million litres, a 10-cent hike in duty translates to revenue of \$30 million a year.

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"Why \$100? Why was it not pegged to engine displacement? It should have been a percentage reduction instead," Mr Ng said.

Most oil companies have already adjusted pump prices to reflect the duty hike.

Shell's diesel is now \$1.85 a litre, while the fuel at Caltex and SPC is \$1.81, all before discount. However, Esso upped its rate by 11 cents to cover the corresponding rise in the goods and services tax charge. ComfortDelGro, the largest taxi firm here, has likewise raised diesel prices for its cabbies to \$1.15 net.

While diesel is still cheaper than

ators who have private arrangements with families, they can technically revise their rates more quickly," he said.

Motorist Ng Tzong Sheng, who drives a 1.6-litre turbo-diesel Skoda Superb, said the "anti-diesel sentiment is out of proportion".

"What is the total diesel contribution to air pollution? Less than 10 per cent," added Mr Ng, a 40-year-old engineer.

He is also unhappy with the Budget's \$100 reduction in Special Tax for diesel passenger cars that was announced along with the diesel duty hike.

Travellers question effect of cuts in GST relief on coffers

Jolene Ang

The latest measure to tighten the goods and services tax (GST) import relief is an unnecessary inconvenience, said several frequent travellers, questioning how much of a difference it would make to the Government's coffers.

Under new rules that kicked in yesterday, a day after the reduced relief was announced by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat in his Budget speech, people returning

from abroad can claim tax exemption on a smaller amount of their overseas shopping.

Those who spend fewer than 48 hours outside Singapore can avoid paying the 7 per cent GST if the total value of items bought abroad is \$100 or less, down from \$150.

The threshold has also been lowered from \$600 to \$500 for travellers who spend 48 hours or more outside the country.

Also, from April 1, the alcohol duty-free concession will be reduced from 3 litres to 2 litres.

A Singaporean who often goes across the border to Malaysia with his family to buy groceries said the changes are not likely to have a major impact on people like him.

"Most people who go to Malaysia do so as a family. Lowering the value of goods (exempt from)... the 7 per cent GST will not really impact you a lot if you are just buying groceries," he said, declining to be identified.

"People also go into Malaysia for food and services, so in terms of their spending on goods, the lower

threshold is reasonable," he added.

Businessman Yap Kok Kin, 57, who flies frequently, noted that the difference in GST payable was minimal: \$3.50 for the additional \$50 worth of goods above the new \$100 threshold, and \$7 for every \$100 past \$500.

Singapore Customs collected about \$4.8 million in GST from travellers at the border last year.

Its spokesman told The Straits Times: "The revision of GST import relief for travellers ensures that our tax system remains resilient, given

rising international travel."

When contacted, CIMB Private Bank economist Song Seng Wun said the move could be more of a message to travellers than a revenue-raising exercise.

"To the lay person, the changes may not seem necessary. Most people will ask, 'what is the point?'"

But recent incidents suggest that the message to declare goods bought overseas for personal consumption is lost on some people, he said. He cited the case of a woman who was arrested last year for fail-

ing to declare for GST payment the branded handbags and accessories she brought back from Paris. Their value exceeded \$10,000. Her luggage was checked when she tried to exit the Customs Green Channel without declaring them.

Mr Song said: "The Customs checks are extremely random, so some people may take it for granted that they are not going to be taxed for personal consumption."

"So, the message here is that even if the Government closes an eye (when it comes) to people who fail to declare their overseas purchases, you shouldn't abuse the system," he added.

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BUDGET 2019

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WORD ANALYSIS

What were the words used most often in this year's speech?

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ROUNDTABLE

Follow the discussion with industry experts led by ST associate editor Vikram Khanna on Sunday. www.straitstimes.com



HOW MUCH WILL YOU GET?

- Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat delivered his fourth Budget speech on Monday, focusing on building a strong and united nation in the face of global changes.

- Among this year's major Budget announcements were the \$6.1 billion Merdeka Generation Package for those born in the 1950s and a \$1.1 billion Bicentennial Bonus, which will benefit a wide range of citizens from lower-income individuals to parents with schoolchildren to those in their silver years.

- Find out what you will receive with our Budget 2019 calculator. str.sg/calculator2019



For more, visit the Budget microsite at str.sg/budget2019

MFA: Dec meeting with Malaysia on water overshadowed by new issues

The Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) said yesterday that the attorneys-general of Malaysia and Singapore met after both prime ministers agreed that officials should have discussions to better understand each other's positions on the right to review the price of water.

However, the ministry said the meeting in December was overshadowed by new issues. It was re-

sponding to media queries in the wake of comments yesterday by Malaysia's Foreign Minister that "negotiations" on the price of water had taken place last month.

The ministry reiterated that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his Malaysian counterpart Mahathir Mohamad had "expressed their willingness for officials to have further discussions to better understand each other's positions

on the right to review the price of water under the 1962 Water Agreement" during a meeting in Singapore in November.

It added: "The attorneys-general of both countries subsequently met in December 2018, but their discussions were overshadowed by the new issues that had arisen over the Johor Baru Port limits and the Seletar Instrument Landing System procedures."

Earlier yesterday, Malaysia's Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah gave a different account on the status of water talks.

"We are now into the second stage of negotiations where we want to talk numbers. The first stage was to agree to talk. That in itself is quite an achievement," he told reporters after visiting the Rohingya Education Centre in Klang, Selangor.

The water issue resurfaced in June last year when Dr Mahathir said that the price of raw water sold to Singapore is "ridiculous" and that Malaysia will approach Singapore to renegotiate the terms of the agreement.

Under the 1962 Water Agreement between the two countries which expires in 2061, Singapore is entitled to draw up to 250 million gallons a day (mgd) of raw water from

the Johor River at three sen (one Singapore cent) per 1,000 gallons.

Johor is entitled to buy 5 mgd of treated water from Singapore at 50 sen per 1,000 gallons. Singapore has said this price is heavily subsidised and below the cost of treating the water.

Singapore's stance is that in 1987, Malaysia lost its right to review the price under the 1962 Water Agreement when it chose not to do so.

‘Monster’ who forced wife into prostitution gets 25¹/₂-year jail term

Jobless man, who also sexually abused six-year-old daughter and wife's niece, sentenced to 24 strokes too

Selina Lum
Law Correspondent

A 27-year-old jobless man who forced his wife to prostitute herself to pay for their baby son's diapers and milk powder was sentenced to 25¹/₂ years in jail and 24 strokes of the cane yesterday.

He also admitted to forcing his six-year-old daughter to perform oral sex on him, as well as undressing, kissing and fondling his wife's 13-year-old niece on the day she was supposed to take a PSLE exam.

"You are a monster," High Court Judge Chan Seng Onn said in sentencing the man.

Citing the prosecution's submissions, the judge said: "The sordid sexual depravity of his transgressions is unprecedented and involves him sexually exploiting the three most vulnerable women in his life – whom he had every responsibility to protect."

The case was described by prosecutors as the "first case of its kind" and the most aggravated case of human trafficking in Singapore.

Seeking at least 22 years in jail

EXTREME DEPRAVITY

The sordid sexual depravity of his transgressions is unprecedented and involves him sexually exploiting the three most vulnerable women in his life – whom he had every responsibility to protect.



HIGH COURT JUDGE CHAN SENG ONN, in sentencing the man who had exploited his daughter, his wife and her niece.

and 24 strokes of the cane, Deputy Public Prosecutor Eunice Lau said the man regularly inflicted violence on his 28-year-old wife and emotionally harangued her to ensure that she fulfilled a daily quota.

Over a three-month period between June and August 2016, she provided sexual services to about 138 men – an average of three to five customers a day.

All her earnings – close to \$11,000 – were handed to her husband.

Justice Chan imposed a \$12,000 fine to disgorge the profits made by the accused. If the man cannot pay, he will have to spend two more months in jail.

The offences came to light after the man's mother reported him to the police in August 2016 for sexually assaulting his daughter.

The court heard that the man, who cannot be named to protect the identities of the three victims, had a long history of physically abusing his wife, even before they got married in 2012.

He began beating her in 2009, a year after they started a relationship. The violence increased in severity and frequency, and persisted while she was pregnant. From June 2015, he assaulted her at least once a week.

The woman did not dare to use her mobile phone or contact her

family members. She also did not report him to the police as he had threatened to kill her if she disclosed the abuse.

Between 2010 and 2015, the family relied on the wife's salary as a receptionist and office assistant. She would hand over her \$1,800 salary to the man, who gave her a transport allowance.

The couple faced financial problems when she stopped working.

In June 2016, he rejected her request that he get a job and, instead, demanded that she prostitute herself. He badgered her until she eventually succumbed.

The man, who frequently used online platforms to engage prostitutes, taught her how to solicit customers on such a website.

He taught her to use online monikers like "Single Mum" to advertise her services, and to respond to interested customers with details such as her bust size.

He told her to charge between \$80 and \$100 for an hour of sexual service, and \$120 for two hours. If she failed to meet her daily quota of customers, she had to make up for it the next day. He also made her secretly record her acts with customers as he had a fetish for seeing her having sex with other men.

On one occasion, he insisted that she provide sexual services to a customer who turned out to be her classmate. When she failed to persuade her classmate to take part in a threesome, he punched her and hit her with a dumb-bell. Desperate to appease him, she tried to look for more customers online.

Yesterday, the man pleaded guilty to one charge each of procuring a woman for the purpose of prostitution and of receiving payment in connection with exploitation of a trafficked victim. He also pleaded guilty to a charge of sexual assault by penetration of a minor and a charge of aggravated outrage of modesty. Four other charges were considered during sentencing.

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Sexual assaults on daughter and niece

Just after having sex with his wife, the jobless man beckoned his six-year-old daughter over and forced her to perform oral sex on him.

This was despite him suspecting at the time that he had a sexually transmitted disease.

The sexual assault on the girl took place at a Balestier hotel, where the family was staying between July 20 and Aug 14, 2016. The man had moved his family out of his mother's flat after an argument.

On Aug 14, the family moved back with the man's mother.

She called the police on Aug 20 after her granddaughter revealed that the man had done "something bad" to her.

It was during police investigations into the sexual assault that the man's wife disclosed she had been forced to prostitute herself.

Yesterday, a character reference letter from the man's mother was submitted to the court by his lawyer, Mr Ng Boon Gan, during his plea for leniency. The contents of the letter were not read out in court.

The man's third victim was his wife's 13-year-old niece.

On the evening of July 31, 2016, the man became angry with his wife for failing to service more customers because she fell asleep due to fatigue.

He assaulted her and insisted that she bring her niece to him. The court heard that he had previously made sexual advances towards the teenager.

His wife initially refused as she knew her niece was taking her Primary School Leaving Examination and she suspected that he would harm the girl. But she eventually complied after he threatened to hit her again.

She waited outside her niece's school at 6.30am on Aug 1 and led her away despite the girl telling her that she had an oral examination that day.

The woman took her niece to a Balestier hotel and left the room after telling the girl to take a shower.

She handed the room key to her husband, who undressed himself and hugged the girl when she came out of the shower. He pinned her down on the bed, removed her T-shirt and bra, and groped and kissed her.

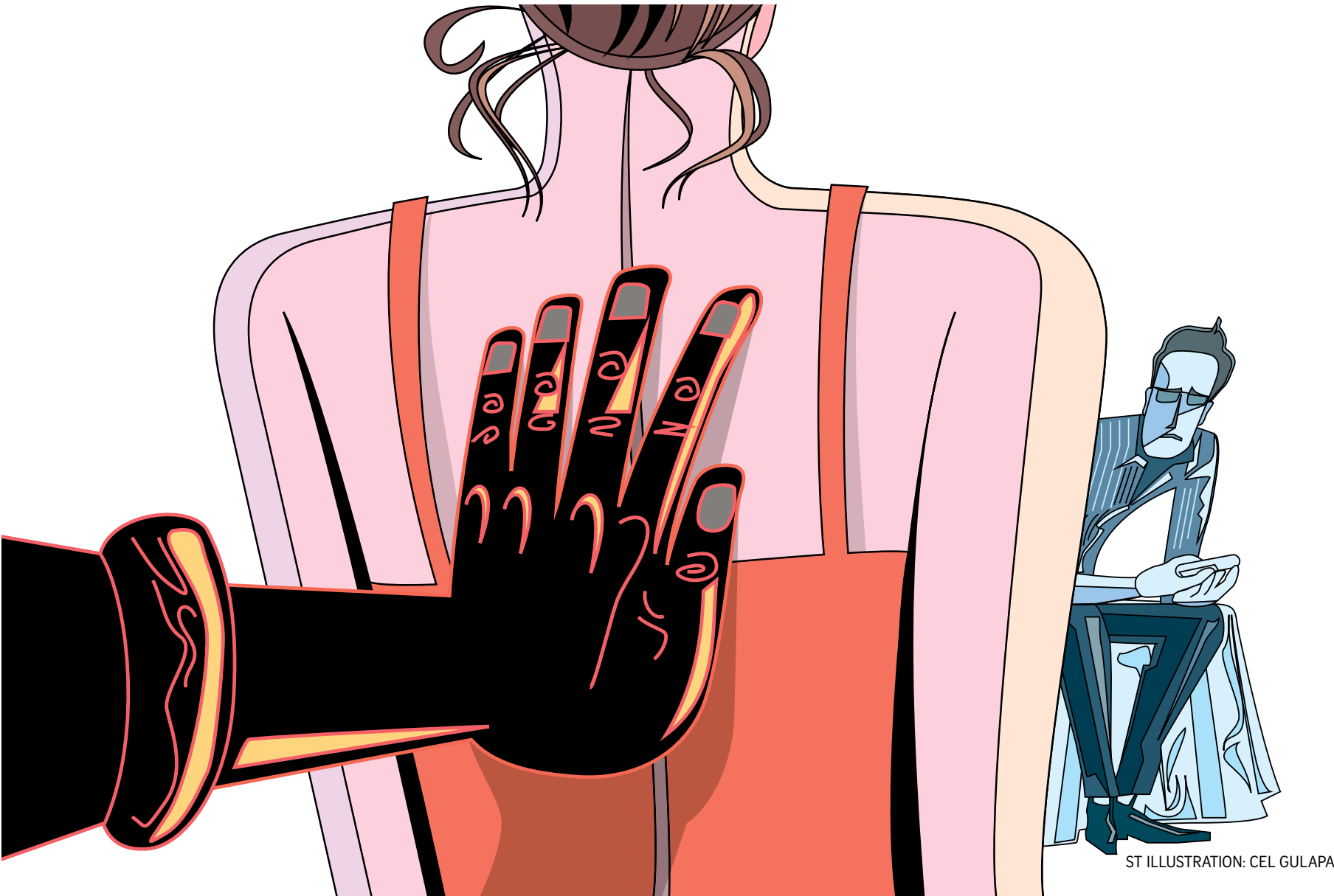
He also placed a pillow over her face to muffle her screams but panicked when she stopped struggling. He then ended the assault and notified his wife.

The woman took her niece to a nearby polyclinic to obtain a medical certificate to excuse her from school that day.

Despite the ordeal, the girl went back to school as the principal had arranged for her to take her exam in the light of her absence. However, she did not tell her principal what had happened.

A psychiatric assessment stated that the man has antisocial personality traits and poses a risk to his daughter. The report noted that he was "somewhat boastful of his sexual exploits".

Selina Lum



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

Singapore militant owned businesses in JB, including massage parlours: Sources

KUALA LUMPUR • A Singaporean man arrested recently for militant activities had multiple businesses in Johor Baru, ranging from massage parlours to restaurants.

Sources said the militant, whom Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs identified as Mohamed Kazali Salleh, 48, also brought in scrap cars from Singapore and Indonesia to Malaysia.

"The authorities are investigating whether the businesses were a

front for the Islamic State terror group," said a source, referring to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) by another name.

Kazali was among six militants detained by Malaysia's Bukit Aman counter-terrorism police in anti-terror sweeps between Dec 19 and Jan 28.

The militant, who had given funds and received orders from Malaysian militant leader Akel Zainal, was told to recruit a few oth-

ers for an attack on a Freemason building in central Johor Baru, another source said.

"He had been in close contact with Akel since 2008. The authorities discovered that in December last year, Akel told him to target a Freemason building in the Nong Chik area," the source said.

Kazali was handed over to the Singapore authorities on Jan 7 after Bukit Aman completed its investigations.

He was detained under Singapore's Internal Security Act. "Based on intelligence, the suspect was not leading any terror cell in the island republic," said a source.

Five others were detained along with Kazali during the operations by Bukit Aman police – two Malaysians and three men from Bangladesh, the Philippines and a South Asian country.

Inspector-General of Police Mohamad Fuzi Harun said the two

Malaysian men had been deported from a foreign country for their involvement with ISIS, and were arrested in Sepang.

It has been learnt that the duo were working in a farm in Australia before being deported.

A 21-year-old Filipino, who was a member of the Abu Sayyaf group, was arrested in Kota Kinabalu, followed by a 26-year-old South Asian who was detained in Puchong, and a Bangladeshi

cleaner in Klang.

Sources said that the South Asian man had been harbouring his fellow countrymen for a month.

"His friend is listed under Interpol's Red Notice for his involvement in terrorist activities," the source said.

The latest arrests bring the total number of militants detained in Malaysia since February 2013 to 459 people.

THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

American at centre of HIV data leak appears in US court

Brochez pleads not guilty to trespassing on mum's home, alleges interference by S'pore



Mikhy Farrera Brochez being escorted out of the Clark County District Court (below) in Winchester, Kentucky, on Monday. He said the trespassing charge was causing him "unnecessary hardship". PHOTOS: ARDEN BARNES FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

Charissa Yong
US Correspondent
In Winchester (Kentucky)

Mikhy Farrera Brochez, the American at the centre of the recent HIV database leak in Singapore, pleaded not guilty to a charge of criminal trespassing on his mother's property in Kentucky.

In a scheduled appearance before District Court Judge Charles W. Hardin at a court hearing on Monday, Brochez, who drove a white car to the courthouse, said it was his understanding that his mother did not want to pursue the charge.

"This is causing me to be suspended from work. I am not able to support myself," he said at the Clark County District Court in Winchester, a town of 18,000 in the southern state of Kentucky.

"This is causing me unnecessary hardship," added Brochez, who previously told The Straits Times that news of the HIV data leak had cost him his job.

Judge Hardin told Brochez, 34, that once charges were filed, it became the Commonwealth of Kentucky's case - and no longer his mother's - to prosecute.

Brochez, who was deported from Singapore in April last year after serving a jail term for several fraud and drug-related offences, was arrested for criminal trespass at the home of his mother Teresa King on Dec 8 in Clark County, Kentucky.

He had previously been warned not to return after a Sept 27 visit to her home, according to court documents. Although he was instructed to leave numerous times, Brochez kept wanting to ask about the property of his which Ms King had, said the post-arrest complaint seen by ST.

On Monday, Judge Hardin said that as Brochez's charge did not carry jail time, an attorney could not be appointed for him and he had to hire an attorney for himself if he needed one.

Brochez said: "But pleading guilty could cost me my job." He added that he had been told the case was going to be dropped, but that the Singapore Government might be interfering with it.

The judge replied: "I know nothing about that, sir."

Brochez was named by Singapore's Ministry of Health (MOH) last month as the culprit who leaked online the personal informa-

tion of 14,200 individuals with HIV. Last Saturday, the Singapore Prison Service made a police report after he sent an e-mail illegally disclosing the details of 13 HIV-positive people scheduled for a health check-up at Changi Prison Complex last year.

Asked why he published the personal data of HIV-positive individuals when doing so could hurt them, Brochez side-stepped the question and reiterated his claim that he was gang-raped while in prison, which MOH said it investigated and found to be false.

Brochez said: "I was thrown in prison for something that I didn't do, and I was held down and gang-raped by your government. And you want to talk to me about someone's feelings? Do you have any idea what I am going through right now?"

Asked if he had more data that he was planning to publish, he said the authorities in Singapore would find out "if they continue to hold my husband on unlawful charges."

His partner Ler Teck Siang was head of MOH's National Public Health Unit from March 2012 to May 2013, and had access to the HIV Registry for his work.

Ler has been charged under the Official Secrets Act for failing to take reasonable care of confidential information regarding HIV-positive patients.

On Feb 13, Brochez claimed in a series of Facebook posts that he was abused while in police custody, sexually assaulted while in prison and contracted HIV only then, was denied HIV medication while in jail, and that the registry was leaked by another person.

The Singapore Government denied the allegations.

Brochez's posts came after Health Minister Gan Kim Yong gave a ministerial statement in Parliament on Feb 12.

Mr Gan explained how the registry had fallen into Brochez's hands, the events leading up to Brochez leaking the information online, and the steps the authorities have since taken to manage the leak.

Brochez, who wore a grey jacket over a navy, yellow and white checkered shirt, also corrected Judge Hardin on the pronunciation of his name: Mee-kai, not Mickey.

He is next due in court on March 4.

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Brochez, who was deported from Singapore in April last year after serving a jail term for several fraud and drug-related offences, was arrested for criminal trespass at the home of his mother Teresa King on Dec 8 in Clark County, Kentucky. He had previously been warned not to return after a Sept 27 visit to her home, according to court documents. Although he was instructed to leave numerous times, Brochez kept wanting to ask about the property of his which Ms King had, said the post-arrest complaint seen by The Straits Times.

Prisons explains why there's printed list of HIV-positive inmates

Fabian Koh

It is standard practice to prepare a printed list of HIV-positive inmates for their medical reviews, said the Singapore Prison Service (SPS), shedding light on its internal processes after photos of such a list were leaked by American Mikhy Farrera Brochez.

Responding to queries from The Straits Times, SPS said yesterday that HIV-positive inmates are typically scheduled for medical reviews by its appointed medical service provider Parkway Shenton, which take place within prison compounds.

"To facilitate the medical reviews, and for the attending physician's reference in particular, and also for Parkway Shenton and Prisons' records, Parkway Shenton prepares a list of the inmates scheduled for reviews on a particular day," said SPS.

Also, when being moved from their cells to their medical reviews, the inmates would be escorted by prison officers, said SPS, which added that HIV-positive inmates are housed separately from other prisoners.

SPS had said in a statement on Sunday that Brochez, who is at the centre of the HIV Registry data leak, had illegally disclosed details of 13 HIV-positive people scheduled for a check-up at Changi Prison Complex on March 28 last year.

He had sent an e-mail on Saturday to some government authorities and media organisations containing photographs of a piece of paper with a list of NRIC or FIN numbers of the HIV-positive individuals, including himself.

SPS said it was reaching out to individuals on the list to inform them that Brochez had illegally disclosed their details, and also working with the Ministry of Health (MOH) to provide additional support to those who require it.

"How Brochez came into unauthorised possession of the list is

the subject of ongoing police investigations," SPS said yesterday.

Parkway Shenton chief executive officer Edmund Kwok said the healthcare provider is aware of Brochez's e-mail that was sent last Saturday. "We are assisting fully with the authorities and are unable to comment further as investigations are ongoing," he said.

Brochez had earlier claimed that the list was given to him by Dr Leong Hoe Nam, an infectious disease specialist who treated him in prison.

Rebutting the allegation in a statement last Wednesday, Dr Leong said he never had such a list and that it would have been impossible to give Brochez any kind of written material, given the tight security at the prison.

"Medical confidentiality and patient care were always at the top of our minds. These accusations go against the very fabric of our values," said Dr Leong.

MOH revealed on Jan 28 that Brochez got hold of the details of 14,200 people diagnosed with HIV in Singapore since 1985, and leaked the data online.

It is unclear if the 13 inmates were among the 14,200.

Sources in the prison sector told ST that operations inside the prison complex are very strict.

While inmates are allowed to have approved items such as blankets, toothbrushes and mugs, they are not allowed to have communication or recording devices in their possession.

For medical check-ups, they will have to be escorted and the officers will stay in the medical ward with them until the check-up is completed.

At no point are the doctor and inmate left alone.

While most paperwork is now electronic, there are still hard copies such as admission forms.

The documents are confidential and handled by prison staff.

At no time are the inmates allowed to see the documents.

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WORLD



THAE YONG-HO
EX-N. KOREAN DIPLOMAT
WARNS U.S. AGAINST LIFTING
SANCTIONS ON PYONGYANG **A13**



Indian Muslims holding up a scratched photo of Pakistan-based terror group chief Masood Azhar as they shout slogans against Pakistan during a protest in Mumbai last Friday, the day after an attack on a Central Reserve Police Force convoy in Kashmir that killed more than 40 men. PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Kashmir bombing may put new strain on India-China ties



An Indian boy joining mourners paying their last respects to the Central Reserve Police Force troopers during a candlelight march in Bhopal last Saturday.

Indian trade bodies urge boycott of Chinese goods, firms over China's close Pakistan ties

Nirmala Ganapathy
India Bureau Chief
In New Delhi

The suicide bombing attack on Indian forces in Kashmir last week not only reignited tensions with Pakistan, but could also put India's ties with China under new strain. This would reverse recent gains the two Asian rivals have made in reducing distrust and turn Indian public opinion against China. The backlash in India over last Thursday's suicide bombing attack on an Indian paramilitary convoy that killed more than 40 men has sparked calls to boycott Chinese goods and firms by at least two

trade bodies and to limit ties with China, which is close to Pakistan. India suspects Pakistan's involvement in the attack, for which Pakistan-based terror group Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), whose founder and leader Masood Azhar is in Pakistan, has claimed responsibility. In the past two years, China has repeatedly blocked India's bid to get Azhar listed as a global terrorist at the UN Security Council. It cited insufficient evidence for its decision even though JeM is listed as a global terrorist organisation. The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), which protects the interests of hundreds of small traders, has launched a national drive to boycott Chinese goods.

The CAIT said in a statement the campaign aims to get traders and people not to sell or buy Chinese-made products, apart from seeking a total ban on trade with Pakistan. The Swadeshi Jagran Manch, a group affiliated to the powerful Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh organisation that helped Prime Minister Narendra Modi take power, has urged Mr Modi to curb the growth of Chinese companies in India, including banning Chinese apps such as Tik Tok. Indian newspaper editorials also want the government to limit ties with Beijing. "On the external front, China has emerged not only as Pakistan's most important economic partner, but also its international political shield. Delhi can no longer remain silent and must signal its willingness to limit bilateral political and commercial ties with China, if Beijing contin-

TIT FOR TAT
It is a kind of national tragedy for India at the moment. The Chinese have not been forthcoming. In future, if there is a national tragedy in China, India may not be forthcoming.

DR SRIKANTH KONDAPALLI, professor in Chinese studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

ues to protect Pakistan on terror-related issues," the Indian Express said in an editorial on Monday. China is India's largest trading

partner with trade reaching US\$89.71 billion (\$121.6 billion) in 2017-2018, but the two countries also have a history of border disputes. In 2017, a weeks-long border stand-off between their troops took place in Doklam, or Donglang to the Chinese, an area claimed by China and India's ally Bhutan. The stand-off was eventually resolved through diplomacy and the two neighbours have since sought to improve ties by holding high-level exchanges and informal summits between their leaders. The Masood Azhar issue was relegated to the background until last week's suicide bombing in Kashmir brought it to the fore. Following the attack, India's Ministry of External Affairs again urged the United Nations Security Council to designate the JeM leader as a global terrorist.

New Delhi suspects Azhar to be the mastermind behind a series of attacks, including the 2001 attack on India's Parliament which left 14 people dead, including five terrorists, and the 2016 attack on an Indian Air Force base. Still, the Indian government has not responded to the boycott calls, with analysts noting that India is dependent on Chinese imports such as in the power sector. "The boycott of goods is complicated. China doesn't lose much but will be hit in the telecom sector. What will be problematic for China will be its image. Public opinion will be negative," said Dr Srikanth Kondapalli, professor of Chinese studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University. "There is concern in India that this will reduce mutual trust between India and China," he added.

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PM Khan denies Pakistani role in attack

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan said his country had no role in a suicide bomb attack in Kashmir that killed more than 40 Indian soldiers but warned of retaliation if India attacked Pakistan, amid rising tensions between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. India has accused Pakistan of having a "direct hand" in the terror attack on Feb 14, for which Pakistan-based group Jaish-e-Mohammad has claimed responsibility. Mr Khan's statement, which also referred to upcoming elections in India, came a day after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the time for dialogue with Pakistan had passed. He urged dialogue but also warned of reprisals. "It is your election year and we understand that during elections, you will get a boost to teach Pakistan a lesson. If you... launch any attack... Pakistan will retaliate," Mr Khan said in a televised message to the na-

tion and to India. He said he had kept silent till now as he did not want to detract focus from a visit by Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who ended a visit to Pakistan and arrived yesterday in India. "We know it is easy to start a war. It is in the hands of humans to start a war; however, to end war isn't in our hands," said Mr Khan. In response to Mr Khan, India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) called Pakistan the "nerve centre of terrorism". "It is a well-known fact that Jaish-e-Mohammad and its leader, Masood Azhar, are based in Pakistan. These should be sufficient proof for Pakistan to take action," said MEA spokesman Raveesh Kumar. He said it was "regrettable" Mr Khan "has insinuated that India's response to the terrorist attack is determined by the forthcoming general election."

India and Pakistan have gone to war three times over Kashmir and regularly exchange fire along the Line of Control or the de facto border, despite a ceasefire agreement. India says talks with Pakistan depend on Islamabad taking action against terror groups operating on its soil, but Pakistan maintains that Kashmir is the core issue. The attack on the bus carrying paramilitary troops raised tensions between the two countries once again, with India saying it possessed "incontrovertible evidence" of Pakistan's involvement. That proof has not been revealed but a senior Indian army official, Lieutenant-General K.J.S. Dhillon, at a press briefing in Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, charged Pakistan's military, the country's most powerful institution and known to control foreign policy, and spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) with having a hand in it.



In a televised message yesterday, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan warned that his country will retaliate if India launches any attack. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

The attack in Kashmir has created an upswell of nationalism in India, with protests in different parts of the country against Pakistan amid calls for tough action. Analysts noted Mr Khan's statement followed predictable lines. "In both countries, there is a slow hardening of positions at a national

level," said Dr D. Suba Chandran, a professor in international strategic and security studies at the National Institute of Advanced Studies. "I don't foresee any major development, and... major peace initiative (or dialogue) from the Indian side."

Nirmala Ganapathy

Shake-up in Malaysia media firms after BN loses power

Exodus of advertisers, readers to online sites also puts pressure on mainstream media

Hazlin Hassan
Malaysia Correspondent
In Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's media companies, already reeling from an exodus of readers and advertisers who have flocked to alternative platforms online, are now wobbling from the upheavals that followed the toppling from power last May of the long-ruling Barisan Nasional (BN).

Media owners and editors who built cosy ties with BN's coalition partners and their leaders in the 61 years BN ran Malaysia are trying to navigate the new environment, one in which the Pakatan Harapan (PH) alliance has promised freedom of expression for the industry.

Two weeks after PH won power last May, Communications Minister Gobind Singh Deo said the government would form a media council and undertake a review of current laws. "Criticisms are welcome... Reporters can come and see me, to see how we can move forward," he said.

But it is not all about censorship. The unseating of BN has seen a raft of changes at the different publishing companies.

A few days after the polls last year, Tengku Sariffuddin Tengku Ahmad, a key aide to former premier Najib Razak, stepped down as independent non-executive director of Utusan Malaysia.

Majority-owned by Umno, Utusan mirrored for decades the policies of the party which leads BN.

Since PH took power, several top editors have been replaced at the New Straits Times (NST) and Malaysia's biggest television group, Media Prima, which controls four of the most popular free-to-air TV stations, including TV3 and ntv7.

Media Prima also owns NST and the Malay-language newspapers Berita Harian and Harian Metro. Last October, the group appointed Mr Mustapha Kamil Mohd Janor as its news and editorial operations executive director.

He had resigned as group editor of NST in 2016, at the height of the scandal that plagued the state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (IMDB), and criticised the BN government for banning newspapers it controlled – including NST, the

Malay-language Berita Harian and Utusan – from covering the story.

Mr Mustapha Kamil's previous role is now filled by Mr Rashid Yusof, a former press secretary to Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's close adviser and ex-Council of Eminent Persons chair, Tun Daim Zainuddin, who was finance minister from 1984 to 1991. The appointment was made last month.

Financial support for publications previously aligned to BN has also dwindled. Last month, Malaysia's oldest Tamil daily, Tamil Nesan, linked to Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) former president Samy Vellu, was forced to shut down. MIC is a BN coalition partner.

Utusan had to be saved by businessman and Kedah party leader Abd Aziz Sheikh Fadzir, who bought a 31.61 per cent stake in the company on Feb 8. The former Umno MP had resigned from his post as executive chairman of the publishing company last December, having been appointed in June, just one month after BN's loss at the polls. Utusan's shares jumped 126 per cent on news that he is now the majority owner of Utusan.

Meanwhile, Media Prima saw a near-tenfold jump in its net loss from RM69.78 million (\$23 million) in 2016, when it first went into the red, to RM669 million in 2017.

The financial challenges these media companies are facing also mirror the pains their global peers have had to endure – the shift of readers and revenue to online alternatives.

Mr Eddie Hoo Choon Huat, executive editor of English-language daily The Sun, told The Straits Times: "All publications in the country have seen a drastic fall in revenue as advertisers are opting for new ways to reach the public. The online alternative is not the answer yet as it too is struggling to get the revenue formula right."

Although the newspaper has been dogged by speculation that it would fold, it is soldiering on. The Sun now offers a package of print, online and a new interactive paper, which it hopes will pull in more readers and advertisers.

With their survival at stake, newspapers like NST and The Star – controlled by BN component party the Malaysian Chinese Association – have tilted towards PH, while on-

line news site Malaysiakini, which used to be the pro-opposition voice, has been embraced as mainstream media.

But these moves may not be enough to save them from financial realities and changing habits.

In December, Malaysia's oldest English daily, The Malay Mail, ceased its print edition, and retrenched about a third of its 165 staff. Its editor-in-chief, Datuk Wong Sai Wan, told The Straits Times: "We have been doubly disrupted – readership and advertising both are falling rapidly."

"Therefore, the economic future of print and TV is in doubt. Unless a new business model is found, it is very bleak."

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Media owners and editors are trying to navigate the new environment, in which Pakatan Harapan has promised freedom of expression. ST PHOTO: JOSEPH CHUA

Fresh start for ex-Utusan staff

A group of former Utusan Malaysia journalists have set up an independent news site, called bebasnews (or independent news), as a landing ground for those retrenched by the newspaper and working on the site without pay.

The Malay-language newspaper had suffered losses due to declining circulation in recent years.

Its finances deteriorated further after its owner, former ruling party Umno, lost in last May's general election and had its bank accounts frozen as part of a money-laundering probe into troubled state fund 1Malaysia Development Bhd (IMDB).

As at end-December, the newspaper had failed to pay some 700 retrenched workers their compensation payment under a voluntary separation scheme.

The new independent website, started by Utusan's former assistant editor-in-chief, Datuk Zaini Hassan, is trying to raise funds through advertising and public-relations consulting.

Mr Zaini, who was with the publication for 29 years, said the website will not be financed by any political party.

"It will be purely independent. I don't want to make the same mistake as Utusan Malaysia, which was financed by Umno," he said. "It was trapped because of its political links."

The newspaper, founded in 1939, sought to champion the rights of Malays.

Umno took control of the newspaper in the mid-1950s.

Hazlin Hassan

Global airline body objects to Bali's plan to tax foreign tourists

DENPASAR • The International Air Transport Association (Iata) has said that it objects to a plan by the Bali authorities to impose a levy on foreign tourists that might be included in airline tickets.

The group, which represents more than 290 airlines accounting for 82 per cent of total global air traffic, has sent a three-page letter to Bali Governor I Wayan Koster regarding the plan.

"The imposition of a foreign tourist levy (or similar tax) would directly contradict accepted policies on taxation published by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (Icao), a specialised agency of the United Nations," Iata regional vice-president for Asia-Pacific Conrad Clifford wrote on Jan 24. A copy of the letter was made available to The Jakarta Post.

Mr Clifford stated in the letter that Indonesia, as a signatory nation to the Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Con-

vention) and an Icao contracting state, was obliged to adhere to Article 15 of the convention, which stipulates that "no fees, dues or other charges shall be imposed by any contracting state in respect solely of the right of transit over or entry into or exit from its territory".

The Bali administration has drafted a by-law on tourist contributions for the environment and cultural preservation, which has been discussed with the Bali Legislative Council since December.

The island province, which is struggling to reduce plastic waste on and off its shores, produces some 3,800 tonnes of waste every day, only 60 per cent of which end up in landfills.

The council and the administration are considering whether the levy should be included in airfares or collected at special counters at the airport. The first option is seen as more feasible with airlines' help. THE JAKARTA POST/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

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**LVMH CHAIRMAN AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE
BERNARD ARNAULT**

German designer Karl Lagerfeld on the catwalk with US-French model Lily-Rose Depp after the spring/summer 2017 haute couture collection show for Chanel during Paris Fashion Week on Jan 24, 2017.
PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Fashion icon Karl Lagerfeld dies at 85

Tributes pour in for designer best known for breathing new life into Chanel and for flamboyant runway shows

PARIS • German haute couture designer Karl Lagerfeld, artistic director at Chanel and an icon of the fashion industry with his extravagant outfits and striking catwalks, has died aged 85.

Instantly recognisable in his dark suits, pony-tailed white hair and sunglasses, Lagerfeld was best known for his association with Chanel but delivered collections for LVMH's Fendi and his own eponymous label.

French celebrity online magazine Purepeople said Lagerfeld died yesterday morning after being taken to hospital in Neuilly-sur-Seine just outside Paris the night before.

Rumours of his ill health had swirled after he failed to show up at Chanel's January show in Paris for his customary bow.

Chanel chief executive Alain Wertheimer recalled how he had given carte blanche to Lagerfeld in the early 1980s to reinvent the brand, from the Chanel jacket and suit to its tweeds and two-tone shoes.

"Thanks to his creative genius, generosity and exceptional intuition, Karl Lagerfeld was ahead of his time, which widely contributed to the House of Chanel's success throughout the world," Mr Wertheimer said in a statement.

A true craftsman who combined artistic instinct, business acumen and commensurate ego, Lagerfeld was known for his strikingly visual fashion show displays.

LVMH chairman and chief executive Bernard Arnault said the fashion world had lost a creative genius



Lagerfeld taking a bow on May 9, 2013, at Dempsey Hill after showing Chanel's 2013/2014 cruise collection. Singapore was the first Asian city to host the brand's annual cruise show. ST FILE PHOTO



Floral tributes seen placed outside the French fashion house Chanel in Paris yesterday after news broke of Lagerfeld's death.
PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

who helped make Paris the fashion capital of the world, and Fendi one of the most innovative Italian houses.

"I will always remember his immense imagination, his ability to conceive new trends for every season, his inexhaustible energy, the virtuosity of his drawings, his carefully guarded independence, his encyclopaedic culture and his unique wit and eloquence," Mr Arnault said.

Born in Hamburg in 1933, Lagerfeld made his debut with designer Pierre Balmain as an apprentice before moving on to Patou and Chloe and then Italian brand Fendi.

But it was after he joined French fashion house Chanel in 1983 that he gained rock-star status, credited with helping jazz up the label founded by Coco Chanel in 1910 and attracting younger clients.

On Jan 22, Chanel hosted guests in a mock-up Mediterranean garden for its haute couture show.

In a collection inspired by Lagerfeld's favourite period, the 18th century, feathers adorned new twists on the brand's classic tweed suits.

Tributes poured in from around the world for the man affectionately nicknamed "Kaiser Karl".

Britain's Victoria Beckham wrote on Instagram: "So incredibly sad to hear this. Karl was a genius and always so kind and generous to me both personally and professionally."

Italian fashion designer Donatella Versace, sister of the late Gianni Versace, wrote: "Karl, your genius touched the lives of so many, especially Gianni and me. We will never forget your incredible talent and endless inspiration. We were always learning from you."

Chanel said Ms Virginie Viard, its deputy artistic director, would take over creative work for the brand's collections. REUTERS

Taiwan President says she will stand for re-election next year

TAIPEI • Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen said she plans to run for re-election next year despite her flagging popularity and growing hostility from Beijing.

Ms Tsai, who was speaking to CNN correspondent Matt Rivers yesterday on board the presidential plane, said: "It's natural that any sitting president wants to do more for the country, and wants to finish things on his or her agenda."

She added that she wanted to "complete" her vision for Taiwan.

Ms Tsai is the first woman to be elected as Taiwan's president, sweeping to power in 2016 amid promises to overhaul the economy and reduce Taiwan's reliance on mainland China.

But last November, her Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) suffered bruising losses in local elections, prompting her to resign as

chairman of the party. Since then, she has faced calls from senior members of her party to not seek re-election.

But Ms Tsai told CNN she is "confident" that she can win.

"This is something I have prepared for," she said. "It's again another challenge. Being president, you're not short of challenges."

She blamed her party's bruising defeat on what she called a difficult reform agenda, which she has pushed since taking office.

She said: "In good times, you have challenges of one sort, and in bad times, you have challenges of another sort."

Ms Tsai is expected to face a difficult re-election bid. Party chairman Cho Jung-tai last month said the party's flag-bearer will be decided by popular ballot and the outcome will be known by mid-April.

Besides Ms Tsai, former premier

Lai Ching-te is also a favourite to win the party's nomination.

If she wins the DPP primary, Ms Tsai would come up against the candidate from the Kuomintang (KMT), the main opposition party, which favours closer relations with mainland China.

Opinion polls indicate that Ms Tsai is down as much as 30 per cent against potential KMT presidential nominee Eric Chu, whom she defeated in 2016.

She may also need to fob off possible challenges from independents such as Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je.

China and Taiwan have been ruled separately since the KMT government fled to Taiwan after the civil war defeat in the 1940s.

Beijing has said it will not hesitate to use force if Taipei formally declares independence.

Ties between the two sides have been tense since the independence-leaning Ms Tsai took power.

In January, Chinese President Xi Jinping gave a landmark speech in which he said the island's unification with the mainland was "inevitable".

Ms Tsai hit back, saying her people would never relinquish their democratic freedoms – an unusually robust response that saw her receive a bump in the polls.

Trade talks with China resume in US capital

WASHINGTON • Trade talks between the United States and China aimed at ending a damaging tariff war resumed yesterday in Washington, the White House said.

The last set of talks ended last Friday in Beijing with no deal, though US President Donald Trump said discussions were going "extremely well" and suggested that he could extend a March 1 truce deadline for an agreement to be reached.

The next round of negotiations will begin with deputy-level meetings before moving on to principal-level talks tomorrow, said a White House statement issued on Monday.

For the US, the talks will be led by Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and include Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, economic policy adviser Larry Kudlow and trade adviser Peter Navarro.

China's commerce ministry, meanwhile, announced it would be represented by Vice-Premier Liu He, Beijing's top trade negotiator and key aide to President Xi Jinping, who agreed to a trade war truce with Mr Trump at a meeting in Buenos Aires in December.

"We hope China and the US will both work hard together to implement the important consensus reached by our two heads of state in Argentina, get down to work, and walk together in the same direction towards a mutually acceptable and mutually beneficial agreement," foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told reporters yesterday.

Last Friday, Mr Trump reiterated he might be willing to hold off on raising tariffs to 25 per cent from the current 10 per cent on March 1 on US\$200 billion (S\$271 billion) in Chinese goods if Washington and

Beijing are close to finalising an agreement to deal with US complaints about unfair trade and theft of American technology.

American officials accuse Beijing of seeking global industrial predominance through an array of unfair trade practices, including the alleged theft of American intellectual property and massive state intervention in commodities markets.

Since the December detente, China has resumed purchases of some US soya beans and dangled massive buying of American commodities to get Washington's trade negotiators closer to a deal.

Beijing and Washington have imposed duties on more than US\$360 billion in two-way trade, which are weighing on their manufacturing sectors and have shaken global financial markets.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Defector warns US: Beware of N. Korea's nuke trap

Do not rush to lift sanctions as Pyongyang has no plans to ditch arsenal, says ex-envoy

Chang May Choon
South Korea Correspondent
In Seoul

A prominent defector has urged the United States to focus on getting North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons and facilities and return to the non-proliferation treaty at next week's Trump-Kim summit, instead of being too quick to lift some of the economic sanctions hurting the regime.

Mr Thae Yong Ho, who was deputy ambassador at the North Korean embassy in London before defecting to South Korea in 2016, also warned that Pyongyang has no intention of surrendering its nuclear arsenal and may, in fact, view the Feb 27-28 summit in Hanoi as a chance to gain recognition as a de facto nuclear weapons state.

Speaking to the foreign media in Seoul yesterday, Mr Thae also said that the North may seek to sell its nuclear weapons and know-how to other countries if negotiations with the US fail.

Nuclear dissemination could be the "new path" stated by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in his New Year's Day speech, he added.

Mr Thae's comments came as preparations are under way for Mr Kim and US President Donald Trump to meet in Hanoi. US special representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun is expected to meet his North Korean counterpart, Mr Kim Hyok Chol, there this week to discuss summit details.

The two leaders met in Singapore for their first summit last June and inked an agreement to work towards complete denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.

But both sides have failed to make any progress due to US demand for concrete action first before easing sanctions, while the North is pushing for corresponding measures.

On Jan 1, Mr Kim warned that the North could "seek a new path" if the US "misjudges our patience

and forces things upon us while maintaining sanctions and pressure instead of keeping the promises it made". He did not give details.

Some experts said he might return to provocations, but Mr Thae reckons that a more likely scenario would be one where the North exports its nuclear capability to the Middle East.

"They'd play the nuclear dissemination card instead of (conducting) testing," he added.

According to Mr Thae, North Korea had staged provocations to manipulate the US into thinking that there is a nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula. This would eventually force the US to go into negotiations with the North and indirectly recognise the regime as a nuclear weapons state.

"Unfortunately, the US President fell into this trap," he added.

Mr Thae also warned the US against adopting a Trump Doctrine, where the superpower cares only about eliminating North Korea's nuclear threat against itself and neglects its ally South Korea.

"If the US is really trying to achieve denuclearisation on the Korean peninsula, it is necessary to require North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to declare discarding his nuclear weapons and facilities, and to return to the non-proliferation treaty," he said.

What Mr Kim will want in return is sanctions relief, like the resumption of inter-Korea projects, including the Kaesong Industrial Complex and Mount Kumgang tours.

These concessions may seem small, but Mr Thae warned that they may eventually lead to China and Russia also demanding to resume trade with the North. China is the North's only ally and largest trade partner.

"North Korea is looking for a breakthrough by focusing on Kaesong and Kumgang, but the bigger fish is China."

changmc@sph.com.sg



Taiwanese cat breeder Chang Chin-yi plays with one of the many persian cats she owns. A Hong Kong woman allegedly stole two persian kittens from Ms Chang's flat and smuggled the cats under her clothes through Taiwan's airport to Hong Kong. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

'Cat burglar' flees Taiwan with two kittens

TAIPEI • An alleged cat burglar from Hong Kong reportedly smuggled two stolen persian kittens through Taiwan's biggest airport by hiding them under her clothes and pretending to be pregnant.

The brazen theft prompted the authorities at Taoyuan airport to launch an investigation into how the woman was able to breeze through security without her feline contraband being spotted, Apple Daily reported yesterday.

The Taiwanese tabloid said police obtained footage from the airport showing the woman, carrying a white bag, leaving a public wash-room more plump than when she entered before passing through security.

Cat breeder Chang Chin-yi said

she noticed two kittens - Anngi and Da Lili - had been stolen on Feb 5.

"It was during feeding time, I went in... with bowls of meat and that was when I saw that the cats were missing," she said.

Her apartment houses some 40 persian cats that sell for as much as US\$3,300 (S\$4,500) each.

Ms Chang immediately suspected a Hong Kong woman who had planned to buy Anngi and had stayed at her house the month before.

Ms Chang changed her mind on the sale, fearing that the woman already had too many cats.

"(She) went crazy. She was crying and screaming at me over the phone when she heard the news," Ms Chang recalled.

Surveillance footage outside the apartment in an upmarket suburb of New Taipei City showed the woman leaving through a side door with a cat under each arm, before bundling them into a white bag.

Ms Chang confronted the woman on Facebook messenger and the latter eventually admitted to the theft, according to screen grabs of private messages Ms Chang posted publicly on Facebook.

Agence France-Presse (AFP) contacted the Hong Kong woman by phone on Tuesday and a man who identified himself as her husband answered.

He said he had no knowledge of his wife's plan and that a friend of Ms Chang's who lives in Hong Kong is now looking after the two cats.

"We are sorry that this incident happened," he told AFP.

New Taipei City Police Department confirmed that it was treating the incident as a burglary - although they have limited recourse, given that Hong Kong and Taiwan have no extradition agreement.

Ms Chang said she planned to travel to Hong Kong in the coming days to pursue legal options.

It is not clear what Anngi and Da Lili's fates will be.

Cats arriving without documentation in Hong Kong must spend at least four months in quarantine or face being put down.

Taiwan accepts only cats from Hong Kong that have certificates showing they are free of rabies.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Subsidies encourage bride-buying in S. Korea

SEOUL • Increasing a rural population that has been declining for some 30 years in South Korea has long been near the top of the government agenda, with some municipal governments resorting to helping to pay for foreign brides.

More than 35 municipal governments that depend on the agriculture and fisheries industries have implemented by-laws providing marriage subsidies to men who tie the knot with foreign brides. The subsidies range from 3 million won (S\$3,610) to 10 million won.

This year, the highly controversial subsidies are offered by more than 35 municipal governments that have been facing decreasing populations since the 1980s due to urbanisation.

Yangpyeong county in Gyeonggi province, for instance, provides 10 million won to men between the ages of 35 and 55 working in the agriculture, fishing or forestry industries who have never been married and have lived in the area for more than three years.

Since the by-law was adopted by Yangpyeong county in 2009, 57 people have received funds. Most of the brides are from Vietnam.

Marrying women from Uzbekistan is the most expensive, costing about 18.3 million won a person, followed by the Philippines at

15.2 million won, Cambodia 14.4 million won, Vietnam 14.2 million won and China 10.7 million won, according to a 2017 study by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family on the international marriage matchmaking business.

Among international marriages, brides from Vietnam accounted for 73 per cent.

In terms of age, South Korean grooms averaged 43.6 years old and foreign brides 25.2, according to the research.

"This form of marriage is basically bride-buying - marriage based on money rather than love," said Mr Jang Han-yeol, director of the Ewha Multicultural Research Institute.

"Such an approach to shopping-like marriage leads to linguistic barriers and human rights problems. The foreign brides are vulnerable to human rights abuses, and are treated as property and expected to take the roles of a housekeeper and a sexual object."

According to a National Human Rights Commission of Korea survey of 920 women marriage migrants, 42.1 per cent replied that they had experienced domestic violence, while 68 per cent had experienced unwanted sexual advances.

THE KOREA HERALD/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



Mr Thae Yong Ho was deputy ambassador at the North Korean embassy in London before defecting to South Korea in 2016. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

WorldBriefs

Indonesia, S. Korea aim to sign trade deal by Nov

JAKARTA • Indonesia and South Korea agreed yesterday to resume talks on a bilateral trade and investment agreement and aimed to sign a deal by November.

Indonesian Trade Minister Enggartiasto Lukita told a business conference in Jakarta an agreement could boost two-way trade to US\$30 billion (S\$41 billion) within three years from US\$20 billion in 2018. Indonesia had put the talks on hold in 2014 due to a change of government in Jakarta. REUTERS

Honda to close its British car factory in 2021

LONDON • Honda will close its only British car plant in 2021 with a loss of up to 3,500 jobs, a major departure of Japanese investment announced just over a month before the United Kingdom is due to leave the European Union.

The Japanese firm, which builds a tenth of Britain's 1.5 million cars at its Swindon plant, said the move was not related to Brexit. REUTERS

Malaysia nears deal with China to revive ECRL

KUALA LUMPUR • Malaysia is making progress in talks with China to revive a high-speed rail project that Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's government said it would cancel, according to Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah.

China is willing to reduce the US\$20 billion (S\$27 billion) price tag for the East Coast Rail Link project and talks are "in the last mile", Datuk Saifuddin said in a Bloomberg interview yesterday. BLOOMBERG

Trump calls talks to remove him 'treasonous'

WASHINGTON • US President Donald Trump said Deputy Attorney-General Rod Rosenstein's reported talks about invoking the Constitution to remove him from office were part of an "illegal and treasonous" push against him.

Former acting FBI director Andrew McCabe had said in an interview on Sunday that Mr Rosenstein raised the possibility of removing the President in 2017 after he fired FBI director James Comey. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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Dress in Health and Fashion
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Your Leg is
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Varicose Veins

Swollen Leg

Skin Ulcers

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✓ Body Oxygen & Blood Circulation Check

The journey towards health begins with a single step

The well-known rule of health "10,000 steps a day"; daily walking is essential in promoting good blood circulation, protecting our cardiovascular health and musculoskeletal system. Walking is also the easiest exercise of all that boosts health and longevity. But do you experience leg discomfort when walking?

Our second heart : Signs of poor circulation appear on legs first

Our feet are located furthest from our heart yet they are the foundation of our entire body. When blood flow down to our legs the speed of blood flow slows down, coupled with gravity and acidic metabolic waste accumulated at our legs, circulation at our legs are therefore slower. Over time resulting in poor circulation. Signs appear in series: ① Spider veins (purple, red, blue veins visible underneath the skin), ② Varicose veins (obvious bulging, swollen and twist veins), ③ Swollen legs (Fluid retention at legs), ④ Skin darkening (inflammation on the skin), ⑤ Foot ulcer.

Walk with Ease : BIO-Mechanics Graduated Compression Tights

OWELL MedicFlow Tights- BIO-Mechanics Graduated Compression Tights (male/ female cut) helps to relieve soreness and swelling, relax pressure on joints, improve circulation and bringing lightness when walking, climbing stairs and standing. Keeping your leg at the top of health.

Balance Pelvic
Lift Glutes
Slim and Shape

Support Thigh
(Quadriceps)
Dissipate load
on the Knee

Controlled and
graduated
Compression

BIO-Mechanically
placed Compressive
Pattern

Relax Knee
Mobilise Joints

Stabilise Calf
Reduce Muscle
Vibration, Soreness
and Cramps

New Launch
MedicFlow Tights
Model No. HMS-3019

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IMM Building #01-136

Malaysia KL Pavilion POS.01.00

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China seeks to 'deepen strategic trust' with Iran

Beijing, which hosts Saudi Crown Prince this week, treads fine line in its Middle East policy

China has traditionally played a small role in Middle East conflicts or diplomacy, despite its reliance on the region for oil, but it has been trying to raise its profile, especially in the Arab world.

BEIJING • China wants to deepen "strategic trust" with Iran, the Chinese government's top diplomat told Iran's Foreign Minister yesterday, days before Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince visits Beijing, underscoring China's difficult Middle East balancing act.

Beijing has traditionally played a small role in Middle East conflicts or diplomacy despite its reliance on the region for oil, but it has been trying to raise its profile, especially in the Arab world.

Saudi Arabia's King Salman visited Beijing in 2017, and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman arrives in China later this week.

However, China has had to walk a fine line as it also has close ties with Saudi Arabia's regional foe, Iran.

Meeting Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif at a state

guest house in Beijing, Chinese State Councillor Wang Yi said he had watched Mr Zarif's Sunday speech at the Munich Security Conference, where he had accused Israel of looking for war.

"I saw on television how you defended the rights of Iran loud and clear at the Munich Security Conference. I think an audience of hundreds of millions of Chinese also watched what you said and you are a famous person now," Mr Wang said, in brief remarks in front of reporters.

"I would like to take this opportunity to have this in-depth strategic communication with my old friend to deepen the strategic trust between our two countries and to ensure fresh progress of the bilateral comprehensive and strategic partnership," he said.

China places a great degree of importance on, and looks forward to, Iran playing an even more constructive role in regional affairs, Mr Wang added, according to a Chi-



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi showing Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif around the state guesthouse in Beijing yesterday. China has had to walk a fine line, maintaining close ties with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

nese foreign ministry statement. It did not elaborate.

Mr Zarif is in Beijing accompanying a delegation that includes Iran's Speaker of Parliament, Mr Ali Larijani, and Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh.

Iran was China's fourth-largest oil supplier last year.

"Our relationship with China is very valuable to us. We consider the comprehensive strategic partnership between Iran and China as one of our most important relations," Mr Zarif said, also in remarks in front of the media.

He also expressed an intention to take part in the Belt and Road Initiative, saying it was of special significance to both Iran and China.

"The Iranian side welcomes China's more important role in issues concerning the Middle East region such as Syria, Iraqi reconstruction and the peace process in Afghanistan," he said.

The two sides also exchanged views on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, an international agreement on Iran's nuclear programme reached in 2015, stating that they would continue to

strengthen communication and co-ordination and make active efforts to safeguard legitimate rights and interests, implement the agreement and defend multilateral rules.

Washington's major European allies opposed last year's decision by US President Donald Trump to abandon the Iran nuclear deal, which includes China and Russia, under which international sanctions on Iran were lifted in return for it accepting curbs on its nuclear programme.

REUTERS, XINHUA

Relocating bodies of 2004 tsunami victims



Workers and volunteers working at a mass grave yesterday in Kahju village, Aceh Besar, Indonesia, as part of a project to relocate newly discovered remains of hundreds of victims of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The grave was unearthed only recently during the construction of a clinic. According to the community, hundreds of mass graves which have not been marked dot the landscape because the tsunami victims were buried in haste in the aftermath of the disaster to prevent disease outbreaks. Nearly 170,000 people died in Indonesia when a 9.1-magnitude earthquake struck Aceh, a predominantly Muslim province in the northern tip of Sumatra island, on Dec 26, 2004, sparking massive waves that also slammed into coastal areas as far away as Somalia. The disaster killed about 50,000 people in other countries around the Indian Ocean, bringing the total number of deaths to about 220,000. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Hardline party, BJP tie up for polls in key state

MUMBAI • A hardline Hindu nationalist group in western India will partner with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the coming elections after agreeing to a seat-sharing plan in Maharashtra state.

The tie-up with the Shiv Sena, a partner in the governing coalition led by the BJP, is a boost to Mr Modi as he seeks alliances ahead of the general election, which must be held by May.

The Shiv Sena had said last year it would contest the election on its own.

In Maharashtra state, the Shiv Sena and the BJP will contest 23 and 25 seats respectively, state Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, also a member of the BJP, told a news conference on Monday in Mumbai.

Mumbai, India's financial capital, is Maharashtra's state capital and where the Shiv Sena is headquartered.

The Shiv Sena has a strong support base in Maharashtra, where they advocate on behalf of locals, largely against immigrants from other parts of India to the state.

Like the BJP, the Shiv Sena believes India is a fundamentally Hindu nation, despite the country's secular constitution.

Maharashtra, India's richest state, sends 48 lawmakers to Parliament, second only to northern Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state, which elects 80 lawmakers.

In the 2014 federal elections, the two parties together won 41 of the 48 seats.

"We have entered into the alliance to keep the opposition parties out," Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray said.

The announcement ends years of bickering between the two parties, which have been allies for about three decades. But their relationship soured and they ended their local partnership over seat-sharing disagreements in state-level elections in 2014.

Mr Modi's BJP has been scrambling to team up with regional parties for the upcoming general election, which pollsters say could produce a fractured mandate.

The Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party, traditional political rivals in Uttar Pradesh, last month forged an alliance in an effort to defeat the BJP.

In a fillip to opposition parties, the BJP lost power in three states in December, dealing Mr Modi his biggest defeat since he took office in 2014. REUTERS, BLOOMBERG

Jakarta to open another investment office in S'pore

JAKARTA • Indonesia will open a new office in Singapore to attract even more investment from its top source of foreign investment, senior official Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa has said.

Singapore accounted for US\$9.19 billion (S\$12.5 billion), or 34.4 per cent, of all foreign investment in Indonesia last year, said Dr Purbaya in Jakarta on Monday.

"It (the investment from Singapore) is only 10 per cent of the potential," he was quoted by financial news website kontan.co.id as saying.

Dr Purbaya is a deputy head of the Task Force for the Acceleration and Effective Implementation of Economic Policy formed by the In-

donesian government in 2016.

The task force's main objectives, among others, is to streamline regulations and improve Indonesia's economic competitiveness.

It is chaired by the Coordinating Minister for the Economy and comprises officials from ministries, agencies and the central bank.

The new representative office in Singapore, said Dr Purbaya, will be tasked with approaching potential investors who had expressed interest in Indonesia last year but had failed to follow through.

According to data from the Investment Coordinating Board (BKPM), 721.2 trillion rupiah (S\$69.4 billion) was invested in Indonesia last year, up 4.1 per cent from 2017.

But while foreign investment contributed 392.7 trillion rupiah or more than half of that total, it was down by 8.8 per cent compared with 2017.

Dr Purbaya said many Singaporean companies and representatives of international corporations based in the Republic had shown interest in investing in Indonesia, but were deterred by issues like red tape.

"Our people will follow up on projects pledged from Singapore. We will operate soon," he said, adding that his working group had addressed 120 cases relating to investment and technology. He also said the group was working to resolve 139 investment cases this year.

However, Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry deputy chairman Shinta Widjaja Kamdani expressed doubt that the planned Singapore office would help resolve problems with investment realisation.

She said the duties of such an office would overlap with the BKPM office and the Indonesian Investment Promotion Centre (IIPC) in Singapore. "The idea to help investors invest in Indonesia is good, but Indonesia already has BKPM representation and an embassy in the country," she added.

The IIPC has representative offices in Singapore, Sydney, Taipei, Tokyo, Seoul, Abu Dhabi, London and New York.

Church sexual abuse survivors (from left in photo) Maniuse Mileiosky, Benjamin Kitobo, Peter Saunders, Jacques, Marek Lisinski and Denise Buchanan in front of St Peter's Square in Vatican City on Monday.
PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



Survivors of church sex abuse go global with fight for justice

Activist group mobilising in Rome as Pope Francis hosts summit on tackling wave of child sex abuse scandals

PARIS • After years of struggling alone or finding support in national groups, survivors of sex abuse by priests have formed a new global alliance to pressure the Catholic Church to face up to its crimes.

The group, called Ending Clerical Abuse (ECA), brings together activists from dozens of countries on several continents, and will be mobilised in Rome this week when Pope Francis hosts a hotly awaited summit on tackling the wave of child sex abuse scandals shaking the Catholic Church.

"It's a momentous and a historic movement... to bring a global and unified voice," Mr Peter Saunders, one of the group's co-founders, told Agence France-Presse. "This is the first truly global initiative."

Mr Saunders' story is among countless others told by people who grouped together to form ECA last June, including survivors from Chile, Poland, Switzerland, France, Italy, the Democratic Republic of Congo and elsewhere.

"I was abused at seven years old by a family member. I was also sexually abused by two Jesuit priests at my secondary school at about 12 years of age," the Briton said.

The same priest targeted his brother Michael at the same school six years before him, and died aged 55 after a lifelong battle with drug and alcohol abuse.

"I think the church has been resisting change for many, many years and I think at long last the church is beginning to bow to the pressure put on by survivors, by our media colleagues around the world, and by public opinion," he added.

The group's objectives include forcing the church to take a "zero-tolerance" approach to paedophilia, working to overturn the statute of limitations on abuse cases and supporting victims in areas where speaking out remains difficult, such as in various African and Asian countries.

From today to Sunday, ECA will bring together victims in Rome to

BOWING TO PRESSURE

I think the church has been resisting change for many, many years and I think at long last the church is beginning to bow to the pressure put on by survivors, by our media colleagues around the world, and by public opinion.



MR PETER SAUNDERS, a victim of sexual abuse by priests.

put new pressure on Pope Francis, who has spoken out strongly over the last two years about abuse in the church after a string of scandals worldwide.

But on the ground, survivors say the culture of secrecy within the Catholic hierarchy and an instinct to cover up abuse cases remain entrenched.

"Either I committed suicide or I spoke out," said a 70-year-old Swiss co-founder of ECA who gives his name only as Jacques. "It was a long and painful fight."

He said a priest raped him continually when he was aged 14 to 20. In 2009, after years of therapy, he contacted the priest who abused him and attempted to reach closure.

Only after a five-year struggle did senior church figures "understand the gravity of the acts of their colleague and accept moral responsibility on behalf of the institution", Jacques said.

As he battled for justice, he also found out that the priest had been identified as a possible paedophile even before he was ordained and had been sent to France several times for "treatment".

In 2010, Jacques founded Sapecc, a

victims' group in French-speaking Switzerland, which led to the creation of a commission to investigate abuse and oversee compensation for victims.

In Poland, ECA co-founder Marek Lisinski, 50, said he had long dreamed of a new international organisation "to show Polish victims that they are not on their own". He said he was "assaulted for 10 months by a vicar" at age 13 and his search for justice led to a prosecution.

Over several years, he fought dependencies on alcohol and anti-depressants, made three suicide attempts and went through a divorce.

Finally, after nine years of legal proceedings, the vicar was suspended – but just for three years.

"In 2018, the court ordered him to apologise to me, but did not award damages," Mr Lisinski said. "I have never had the apology."

He added: "The church has ignored victims, moves the perpetrators around (from one parish to another) and refuses to meet us despite the instructions from the Pope. Officially it has apologised... but as an institution it has never accepted its responsibility."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Trudeau's top aide quits amid SNC-Lavalin scandal



Mr Gerald Butts (left) has served the country with "integrity, sage advice and devotion", said Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.
PHOTO: REUTERS

OTTAWA • A top aide to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau resigned unexpectedly yesterday amid allegations that Mr Trudeau's office pressured the former justice minister to help construction firm SNC-Lavalin Group avoid criminal prosecution.

Mr Gerald Butts, Mr Trudeau's principal private secretary and a key architect of the Liberals' 2015 election victory, said in a statement he did not pressure then Justice Minister and Attorney-General Jody Wilson-Raybould over SNC-Lavalin.

Mr Trudeau, who faces a re-election bid in October, has faced criticism since Ms Wilson-Raybould quit his Cabinet following a Globe and Mail newspaper report this month that officials in his office had urged her to let SNC-Lavalin escape with a fine rather than face trial on charges of bribing Libyan officials.

SNC-Lavalin has said it had

sought to avoid a corruption trial because the executives accused of wrongdoing had left the company and it had overhauled its ethics and compliance systems.

Any accusation that "I or the staff put pressure on the Attorney-General (Wilson-Raybould) is not true," Mr Butts said in the statement on Monday. He added that the allegation was distracting from the "vital work" Mr Trudeau was doing and that it was in the best interest of the Prime Minister's Office for him to step aside.

Mr Trudeau accepted Mr Butts' resignation and said he had served the country with "integrity, sage advice and devotion". "I want to thank him for his service and continued friendship," he said in a tweet.

Neither Mr Butts nor chief Trudeau spokesman Cameron Ahmad was immediately available for comment.

Mr Butts, 47, has known Mr Trudeau for more than 25 years, go-

ing back to when they were students at McGill University in Montreal.

Mr Butts was a polarising figure inside the Liberal Party, where some dubbed him PMGB – short for Prime Minister Gerald Butts – and complained privately that he had too much influence.

Ms Wilson-Raybould has not commented on the matter, citing solicitor-client privilege. But Mr Butts' resignation fuelled an opposition demand to drop the privilege.

"It is now more important than ever before that Mr Trudeau waive solicitor-client privilege so Jody Wilson-Raybould can tell her side of the story to Canadians," Conservative leader Andrew Scheer said in a statement.

Ms Wilson-Raybould was shuffled to Veteran Affairs in January, a move widely seen as a demotion for one of Canada's most prominent indigenous federal politicians. REUTERS

California due for mega storm that may affect 1.5m people

LOS ANGELES • Scientists call it California's "other big one", and they say it could cause three times as much damage as a major earthquake ripping along the San Andreas fault.

Although it might sound absurd to those who still recall five years of withering drought and mandatory water restrictions, researchers and engineers warn that California may be due for rain of biblical proportions – or what experts call an ARK-Storm.

This rare mega storm – which some say is rendered all the more inevitable because of climate change – would last for weeks and send more than 1.5 million people fleeing as floodwaters inundate cities and form lakes in the Central Valley and Mojave Desert, according to the US Geological Survey.

Officials estimate the structural and economic damage from an ARKStorm (for Atmospheric River 1,000) would amount to more than US\$725 billion (S\$983 billion) statewide.

One such storm hit in 1861-62. Over 45 days, intense storms hammered the state and dropped 90cm of rain on Los Angeles. So much wa-

ter fell that it was impossible to cross the Central Valley without a boat, and the state capital was moved temporarily from Sacramento to San Francisco.

This year, in the heavily populated areas of the Los Angeles Basin, epic run-off from the San Gabriel Mountains could rapidly overwhelm a flood control dam on the San Gabriel River and unleash floodwaters from Pico Rivera to Long Beach, according to a recent analysis by the US Army Corps of Engineers.

In a series of recent public hearings, corps officials told residents that the 60-year-old Whittier Narrows Dam no longer met the agency's tolerable-risk guidelines and could fail in the event of a very large, very rare storm.

In addition, unusually heavy rains could trigger a premature opening of the dam's massive spillway on the San Gabriel River, releasing more than 20 times what the downstream channel could safely contain within its levees.

The corps is seeking up to US\$600 million in federal funding to upgrade the 5km-long dam, and says the project has been classified as the agency's highest priority na-

tionally because of the risk of "very significant loss of life and economic impacts".

Standing atop the 17m-tall dam recently, lead engineer of the project Douglas Chitwood surveyed the sprawl of working-class homes, schools and commercial centres about 22km south of Los Angeles and said: "All you see could be underwater."

A government study used computer models to estimate the effects of 900-, 7,500- and 18,000-year storm events. In each case, officials say as many as one million people could be affected.

Climate change could upend 20th-century assumptions on future flooding estimates.

Some researchers argue that, in a warming world, regions such as California will experience more whiplashing shifts between extremely dry and extremely wet periods – similar to how California's long drought was quickly followed by the wettest rainy season on record in 2016-17.

These intense cycles will seriously challenge California's ability to control flooding as well as store and transport water. DPA



A woman holding up a sign during a protest in Texas against US President Donald Trump after he invoked emergency powers last Friday to help build the wall that was his signature 2016 campaign promise. The complaint by the 16 states seeks a preliminary injunction that would prevent him from acting on his declaration while the case plays out in the courts. PHOTO: DPA

16 states sue Trump over plan to fund border wall

The 3,142km-long US-Mexico border



Daily border crossings

1 million people | 56 border posts | 370,000 vehicles

Source: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

California-led alliance says US leader misusing emergency declaration to divert funds meant for defence

WASHINGTON • A coalition of 16 US states led by California sued President Donald Trump and top members of his administration to block his decision to declare a national emergency to obtain funds for building a wall along the United States-Mexico border.

The lawsuit filed in the US District Court for the Northern District of California came after Mr Trump invoked emergency powers last Friday to help build the wall that was his signature 2016 campaign promise.

Judges at the same San Francisco-based court have ruled against an array of other Trump administration policies, including on immigration and the environment.

Mr Trump's order would allow him to spend money that Congress appropriated for other purposes. Congress declined to fulfil his request for US\$5.7 billion (S\$7.7 billion) to help build the wall this year.

"Today, on Presidents Day, we take President Trump to court to block his misuse of presidential power," California Attorney-General Xavier Becerra said in a statement.

"We're suing President Trump to stop him from unilaterally robbing taxpayer funds lawfully set aside by Congress for the people of our states. For most of us, the office of the presidency is not a place for theatre," added Mr Becerra, a Democrat.

The White House declined to comment on the 56-page complaint by states with Democratic governors – except for one, Maryland – which seeks a preliminary injunction that would prevent Mr Trump from acting on his emergency declaration while the case plays out in the courts.

In a Budget deal passed by Congress to avert a second government shutdown, nearly US\$1.4 billion was allocated towards border fencing. Mr Trump's emergency order would give him an additional US\$6.7 billion beyond what lawmakers authorised.

Three Texas landowners and an environmental group filed the first lawsuit against his move last Friday, saying it violated the Constitution and would infringe on their property rights.

The legal challenges could slow Mr Trump's efforts to build the wall, which he says is needed to curb illegal immigration and drug trafficking. The lawsuits could end up at the Conservative-leaning US Supreme Court.

Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Virginia and Michigan joined California in the lawsuit.

The states said Mr Trump's order would cause them to lose millions of dollars in federal funding for national guard units dealing with

PLAINTIFF STATES

The 16 states that filed a federal lawsuit challenging Mr Trump's national emergency declaration:

- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Hawaii
- Illinois
- Maine
- Maryland
- Minnesota
- Nevada
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- Oregon
- Virginia
- Michigan

counter-drug activities and redirection of funds from authorised military construction projects would damage their economies.

Mr Becerra said in TV interviews that the lawsuit would use Mr Trump's own words against him as evidence that there was no national emergency to declare.

Mr Trump said last Friday he did not need to make the emergency declaration but wanted to speed up the process of building the wall. That comment could undercut the government's legal argument.

"By the President's own admission, an emergency declaration is not necessary," the states said in the lawsuit. "The federal government's own data prove there is no national emergency at the southern border that warrants construction of a wall."

The complaint noted data issued by Mr Trump's administration that also refuted the notion of an emergency.

"Customs and Border Protection data show that unlawful entries are near 45-year lows," the complaint said.

"The State Department recognises there is a lack of credible evidence that terrorists are using the southern border to enter the United States. Federal data confirm that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than native-born Americans," REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, WASHINGTON POST

Bernie Sanders to seek US presidency again in 2020

WASHINGTON • United States Senator Bernie Sanders, the progressive populist who mounted a fierce challenge to front-runner Hillary Clinton in the 2016 White House campaign, said yesterday he will again seek the Democratic Party's presidential nomination in 2020.

Mr Sanders, the 77-year-old independent senator from Vermont, said one of his primary motivations is to oust President Donald Trump, who beat Mrs Clinton in that election.

"I think the current occupant of the White House is an embarrassment to our country," he said in an interview with Vermont Public Radio.

"I think he is a pathological liar... I also think he is a racist, a sexist, a homophobe, a xenophobe, somebody who is gaining cheap political points by trying to pick on minorities, often undocumented immigrants."

Mr Sanders upended the party establishment three years ago by siphoning support from the Democrats' liberal wing and young people, touching off a leftist movement that ushered progressives like freshman Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez into office in the November mid-term elections.

Mr Sanders starts his 2020 campaign with a long list of potential advantages, including a massive e-mail list of supporters, a proven track record of small-dollar fund-raising and veteran aides who helped chart a path to victory in key states like New Hampshire.

In an e-mail to supporters yesterday, he pledged to build a vast grassroots movement to confront the special interests that he said dominate government and politics.

Mr Sanders said he would push for many of the same issues that powered his 2016 bid, including universal healthcare, raising the minimum wage and free public college tuition.

"Our campaign is about creating a government and economy that works for the many, not just the few," he said in the e-mail, asking for one million people to sign up to start the effort.

But 2020 will be a very different campaign cycle.

Many former Sanders supporters and aides are looking at other options in a diverse field of Democrats that could top 20 well-known names.

Several Democrats already are echoing his economic message at a time when the party is increasingly relying on a voting base made up of women, minorities and young people. In a year when Democratic voters have signalled an increased desire for racial and gender diversity, Mr Sanders would be only the second straight, white man in the field. BLOOMBERG, REUTERS



Mr Bernie Sanders said he would push for many of the same issues that powered his 2016 bid. PHOTO: REUTERS

Let in aid or lose everything, Trump warns Venezuela military

MIAMI • US President Donald Trump delivered his sharpest warning yet to Venezuela's military authorities in an increasingly tense showdown over that country's crisis, proclaiming they would "lose everything" by remaining loyal to President Nicolas Maduro and refusing to allow in emergency aid stockpiled on the border.

Mr Trump gave the warning in a speech on Monday denouncing Venezuela's brand of socialism to an enthusiastic crowd in Miami that included many Americans of Venezuelan descent who have fled Venezuela

or have relatives in the country, once Latin America's wealthiest but now facing the greatest economic collapse in generations.

He spoke five days before a deadline that his administration and the Venezuelan opposition leader, Mr Juan Guaido, have declared for getting humanitarian aid into the country – a move aimed at weakening Mr Maduro, who is no longer recognised by the United States and roughly 50 other nations as the country's president.

Mr Trump was the first to recognise Mr Guaido last month as Mr

Maduro's replacement until new elections can be held.

"We seek a peaceful transition of power, but all options are open," Mr Trump said. He urged all members of the Venezuelan military to permit the aid into the country, and advised them to accept the opposition's amnesty offer – or they will find "no safe harbour, no easy exit, and no way out". "You will lose everything," the US President said.

Despite the tough language, it remained unclear how the Venezuelan opposition would break Mr Maduro's blockade of the border

with a delivery of food and medication on Saturday.

Mr Trump's own national security adviser said the US military – which has airlifted tons of supplies to Venezuela's doorstep on the Colombia border – will not cross into the country.

The ambitious land-and-sea campaign would bring humanitarian supplies through Colombia, Brazil and the Caribbean and eventually into the hands of thousands of Venezuelans who have suffered from protracted shortages of food and medicine.

While Mr Guaido is regarded by the Trump administration as Venezuela's rightful president, the White House still faces the reality that Mr Maduro controls the military, and with it, the state.

"If the opposition – and Trump administration – is trying to find ways to peel away military support for Mr Maduro, threatening its monopoly on food distribution is not likely to be helpful in that regard," said Dr Cynthia J. Arnson, the Latin American programme director at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars.

The opposition has so far been quiet about details of its plans, saying that if it released the information, Mr Maduro would stymie them with his security forces.

Ms Gaby Arellano, an opposition lawmaker sent by Mr Guaido to coordinate the aid, said that the opposition did not necessarily have to use the blocked Tienditas Bridge.

"The border with Colombia is immensely long, and so is the border with Brazil, and the border with the Antilles," she said.

"We want the aid to be coming in at all points," NYTIMES

THE STRAITS TIMES

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The Straits Times says

India’s new reach across waters for trade

As trade volumes go, the 60 tonnes of coconuts exported last month by Indonesia’s Sumatra province to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands of India were but a small drop in the ocean of global trade. But coming in the wake of the sending of samples of eggs and curry noodles from Aceh a few weeks earlier, it could prove to be one giant leap in the common destinies of India and Asean, if not the wider Asian region. Priced at a fraction of what it would cost to import the produce from Chennai – at 1,300km away, the mainland Indian city closest to the Andaman and Nicobar capital, Port Blair – the shipment underscores the reality that ultimately, geography can be destiny if geostrategic barriers can be lowered or removed.

Occupied by Japanese forces during World War II – not unlike large parts of South-east Asia, including Singapore – the Andaman and Nicobars are not only India’s southernmost tip but also give the South Asian giant a foothold in South-east Asia, being about 150km from Sumatra at the nearest point. However, with no direct air links to any place except the Indian mainland, the pristine islands, some of them inhabited by prehistoric tribes, were hidden away from not only South-east Asia but also Indian consciousness. It is a rare Indian prime minister – Mr Narendra Modi is an exception – who has seen the strategic value of the islands. Of late, though, this has been changing, and swiftly. In May last year, Mr Modi and In-

donesian President Joko Widodo agreed to promote trade, tourism and people-to-people contacts and set up the means for that to happen.

Reports at the time suggested India was prepared to build a port in Sabang, Aceh, thus enabling it to essentially straddle a key sea lane of communication. Given that Sukarno’s Indonesia once made claims to the Andamans, and that India has latterly been beefing up its strategic assets there, including by building military airfields, this reflects the growing trust levels between the dominant player in South Asia and South-east Asia’s biggest nation, even if some of this is driven perhaps by shared suspicions of China. For India, which has been slow on the trade liberalisation

front, the coconut shipment is but a small example of the economic advantages of open trade.

As it fixes its infrastructure woes and makes it easier for businesses to get things done, it will push more goods in the other direction. Tourism will follow and net gains from openness will out-strip any fear of being overwhelmed by foreign goods. It is with this sense of confidence that once this summer’s national election is out of the way, India should approach the negotiations to conclude the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement. As much as the guns and ships it may base in the Andamans, India’s security will be truly assured when its eastern neighbours have a stake in its prosperity.

Major upgrade for the security industry

From wages to work conditions to a stiffer penalty regime for errant officers, the security industry is bracing itself for a major transformation. To work, buyers of security services need to support these changes.

Raj Joshua Thomas

For The Straits Times

The security industry in Singapore is undergoing fundamental changes.

These include the Security Agencies Grading Exercise to improve standards of security agencies; the Industry Digital Plan to encourage the use of technology to achieve more effective security outcomes; and the promotion of Outcome-Based Contracts to move buyers towards seeking solutions instead of merely stipulating headcounts.

These target security agencies and security buyers. Ultimately, though, it is the security officers on the ground who determine the success or failure of security operations. Negligence or disregard in carrying out their duties diligently may lead to serious consequences.

The recent introduction of a penalty regime for officers caught breaking the Private Security Industry Act’s (PSIA) Code of Conduct (COC) has received some flak from the public. However, when viewed together with other policies and initiatives affecting officers, and the larger direction of the industry, these penalties are essential to tighten up the industry.

CODE OF CONDUCT PROVISIONS

First, there is a need to spell out the provisions of the COC, as there has been an overfixation on the first provision, that is, officers sleeping on the job.

The other COC provisions are far more serious – being drunk while on duty, abandoning the post, using threatening or abusive language, and failing to respond to a request for assistance. The potential consequences of an officer violating the COC are serious – possibly even leading to harm to persons or death. In this regard, the COC must be looked at holistically.

WAGE INCREASES

The wages of officers are subject to

the Progressive Wage Model (PWM), which stipulates the basic salaries of officers, with built-in increases from this year. Commentators have lamented that officers “earn only \$1,100”. This is incorrect as it looks at only the basic salary component, and does not take into account overtime pay and allowances. With the increase in an entry-level officer’s basic salary to \$1,175 this year, his current gross salary is about \$2,300.

The higher salary translates into higher costs for buyers, who in turn expect an improvement in standards. The hike in wages is mandated by law. It is therefore reasonable that an improvement in standards also be enforced by law.

CHANGES TO WORKING HOURS

Some commentators have correctly pointed out that working long hours may lead to officers sleeping on the job.

However, this does not contribute to other transgressions of the COC, for example, being drunk while on duty. Reducing the work-hours is not a panacea for poor work performance.

Nonetheless, as part of the PWM, the maximum number of overtime hours for officers will be reduced to below 72 hours a month in 2021, down from up to 100 hours currently. This is accompanied by an increase in basic salary so as to ensure that officers do not experience a reduction in gross wages in that year. Barring this specific intervention under the PWM, a reduction in the work-hours, for example, to eight-hour shifts, would lead to a very significant dip in the officers’ gross salaries.

That being said, there is merit in looking at regularising security officers’ shifts to eight hours. Given the important role of security officers on duty, it is essential that they are alert and vigilant. It is questionable whether an officer can remain sufficiently alert over a 12-hour period.

Reducing the work-hours will, however, push up costs to buyers significantly. But these costs can be reduced if buyers scale down the

number of officers required through the use of technology or by removing non-security functions from their job scope.

PROFESSIONAL, WELL TRAINED

The PWM also prescribes training for each grade of officer. With effect from Jan 1 next year, all officers, except those deployed at warehouses and condominiums, are required to have attended the Recognise Terrorist Threats course. Officers are now well trained to perform security functions. Significant effort, time and cost have gone into training them, precisely because the roles they play are important, and negligence in carrying out their duties may lead to serious consequences for private interests and for the public at large.

Furthermore, liquidated damages are imposed on security agencies for precisely the type of behaviour contained in the COC. The entirety of liability is shouldered by the agencies as these damages cannot be passed on to the offending officer. As such, there have been no consequences for offending officers and irresponsible behaviour essentially had no consequences whatsoever.

While security agencies are graded on an annual basis, officers are not graded in any way. With a systemic shortage of security officers in the industry, it was difficult for agencies to address persistently errant officers. Should an agency attempt to discipline an

officer, he could simply quit and swiftly find employment with another agency, only to persist with his bad habits.

The new penalty regime will help ensure that officers are responsible for their actions. It is also sensible now for agencies to invest more time and effort to promulgate procedures and processes around the COC, as there is an enforcement mechanism for breaches.

CHANGING BUYERS’ BEHAVIOUR

Despite the measures outlined here, there is a severe disjoint between the capabilities of the industry and the approach of buyers in hiring officers. Oftentimes, officers are considered odd-job labourers and tasked to carry out non-security roles, including custodial checking and electrical and other sundry works, in addition to taking care of security. Buyers have not shifted their perception of security officers as *jagas* (watchmen).

This attitude is most prevalent in the residential sector, where managing agents in particular play a role in perpetuating these roles as a means to alleviate their own workload and to have others assist them in menial tasks.

This is ill-conceived. As the cost to buyers increase, they will end up paying a premium for workers who have skills and capabilities that are not utilised. At many sites, the work of security officers can be done by other types of contract staff, for example, custodial checkers or

conierge staff. Officers should be deployed only for functions stipulated in the PSIA – patrolling or guarding; keeping property under surveillance; acting as a bodyguard or bouncer; and performing access control and regulation of traffic under the Road Traffic Act.

Once their job roles are streamlined, fewer security officers will need to be deployed and buyers can look at the possibility of moving towards shorter shifts, so as to ensure that officers remain sufficiently alert to perform their security duties. This will keep costs low, while improving security operations. Furthermore, the penalty regime should be applied only to an officer who is errant when he is on actual security duty.

The provisions of the COC should be read strictly with the provisions of the PSIA on the role of security officers in enforcing the penalty regime. This will help protect them from being the victims of unreasonable complaints or being prosecuted for frivolous reasons.

PROTECTING SECURITY OFFICERS

With the introduction of a penalty regime, it is essential that officers have additional protection. Security officers are not considered public workers and do not have any special protection under the Protection from Harassment Act. They also do not have any special powers, save for those under the Infrastructure Protection Act. As such, it is often challenging for

them to carry out their duties, especially when dealing with difficult and unreasonable members of the public.

In this regard, employers and industry players have taken a strong stand against the abuse of security officers. The Security Industry Council (SIC) has introduced an anti-abuse decal to be displayed at sites where officers are deployed. This decal warns that persons who abuse officers may be prosecuted.

The SIC launched the #hortmatsecurity campaign last year to encourage people to respect officers. The Office of the SAS (Security Association Singapore) Counsel is also prepared to privately prosecute persons who abuse officers if the authorities do not.

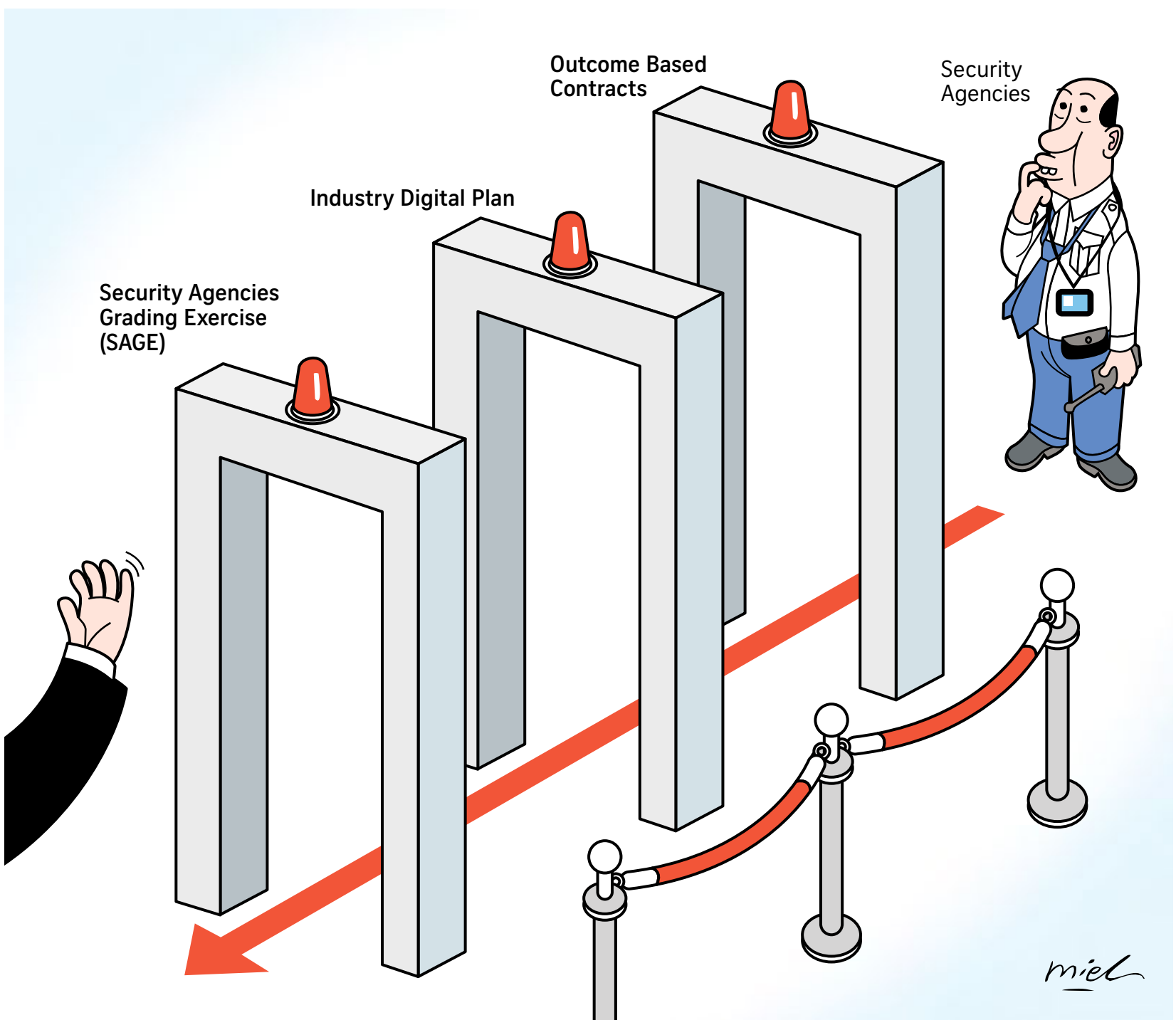
ACHIEVING BETTER SECURITY OUTCOMES

The security industry has started to transform itself and streamline its role. It is quite clear from the introduction of penalties for breaches of the COC that security is viewed as a serious job, with serious consequences for errant officers.

However, as long as buyers do not get in sync with the industry’s direction, the efforts being made by the industry and tripartite partners will come to naught. And buyers will still be left with a higher price tag.

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• Raj Joshua Thomas is president of the Security Association Singapore.





The upcoming discussion about Budget 2019 should not just be a presentation of what the Government plans to do, say the writers, who hope it will be an opportunity for active citizens to question standard economic assumptions, ask for empirical verification, and challenge the presumption that the Government knows (economics) best. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

The danger of Economics 101 in public discourse

Understanding the limits of basic economic theory will help raise the level of public discussion on policies – especially during Budget season

Benjamin Goh and Donald Low

For The Straits Times

As the economics adage goes, there are unlimited wants but limited resources. In any discussion of the Budget, we are constantly reminded of the trade-offs at stake and the values that underpin our social contract as a society. For instance, we may hear that universal social spending would produce unintended negative effects on work incentives or that they are fiscally unsustainable.

These economics-sounding arguments are often accepted without question, much like how we are expected to accept scientific claims produced by scientists.

But we should resist this temptation. Many economic propositions are more an expression of the speaker's ideology or dogma rather than

empirical fact. Consider, for a moment, some often heard claims about the economy: Free trade makes everyone in society better off; or that minimum wages reduce employment.

An economist would react to these statements with much less certitude. He would say that these propositions hold up only under certain (strict) assumptions.

But in public discourse, many of these economic propositions are often taken as fact. In debating the value of the recently concluded European Union-Singapore free trade agreement, for example, it is not unusual to hear statements along the lines of "any Economics 101 class will tell you that free trade benefits everyone in society".

But that is exactly the problem: It is precisely because it is Economics 101 that these claims are made without qualification and without any reference to empirical reality.

As one of the most popular A-level subjects and a compulsory module in some universities, Economics 101 reaches a significant

part of the population. Economics 101, as it is taught in Singapore and around the world, provides a window into the field of economics. Many people encounter ideas along similar lines in casual reading of news reports and commentaries. But it is good to be reminded that a worldview premised on Economics 101 concepts is just one window, not the only window, into the real world.

As a simplified model, Economics 101 teaches students about demand and supply and uses the "standard model" of efficient markets to explain a wide variety of economic policies and phenomena – from taxation to auctions, employment, and growth.

To be able to hold such wide-ranging explanatory power, Economics 101 is built on a number of simplifying assumptions. It presents a stylised (or simplified) model of the market economy, assumes that people and firms are on average rational, that individuals are armed with sufficient information, working in competitive labour markets that pay them wages equal to their marginal product, and that they derive utility from their consumption.

The main job of Economics 101 is to show how the "invisible hand" of the market economy channels the

pursuit of self-interest (or profit) by individuals (or firms) to increase the well-being of society.

Economics 101 is certainly a useful pedagogical method and even a simple, clarifying lens through which to interpret events and policies. But as a social science that tries to demystify the economy and how decisions of resource allocation are made, this approach may have unintended – even harmful – consequences, especially when people take its explanatory value too far.

The students of Economics 101 often forget the simplifying assumptions and remember only its conclusions. They also extrapolate those conclusions to contexts where the (forgotten) assumptions do not hold.

Professor David Laibson, head of Harvard University's economics department, notes that even though there is pedagogical value in teaching basic economic models before moving on to more complex models, "it's useful to know right from the start that these very strong assumptions are really a benchmark model, not a model that we think accurately describes the world".

PROBING COMMON ECONOMIC ASSUMPTIONS

How far off is the standard model from the real world? Let us examine the two economic propositions we started with.

First, Economics 101 posits that free trade makes everyone better off because tariffs impose a deadweight loss on consumers and producers. By eliminating some of the mutually advantageous exchanges that would otherwise have taken place, tariffs (which restrict free trade) are economically inefficient or reduce society's welfare. Free trade – the abolition of tariffs – improves our economic welfare.

The Economics 101 student may walk away thinking that free trade always generates a net gain for society and should be pursued in all instances. But this is not necessarily true.

The work by legendary economics

professor Paul Samuelson suggests, for instance, that tariffs could benefit a large economy such as the United States. In other instances, tariffs may play a distributional role in compensating the "losers" of globalisation.

In today's largely globalised economy, tariffs are less of a trade barrier than domestic regulations (for example, labour standards, consumer safety) and industrial policies aimed at developing infant, indigenous firms or sectors.

Even if the case for tariff reduction is clear, it is by no means obvious that the removal of such barriers is necessarily a good idea. A pursuit of free trade in all contexts would not, as Economics 101 suggests, always lead to optimal outcomes.

Second, there is often the claim that a minimum wage will lead to more unemployment. In Economics 101, this outcome is explained through the standard demand and supply model – demand is the quantity of labour that employers are willing to hire at different wage levels, while supply represents the quantity of labour that workers are willing to provide at different wages.

A minimum wage sets a price (or wage) floor, increasing the quantity of labour supplied and reducing the quantity of labour demanded by employers. The excess supply of labour that results is unemployment: There are workers willing to work at wages below the minimum wage, but firms cannot hire them because of the state-imposed minimum wage. As New Jersey representative Jim Saxton famously said in 1996: "The minimum wage) hurts exactly those workers it intends to help – the poor, the unskilled, and the young."

The Economics 101 student may walk away thinking the minimum wage always reduces employment, and that the people advocating for it are idealistic do-gooders with no grasp of economics.

They would be surprised to know that Nobel laureate for economics Paul Krugman recently stated that "we have a lot of evidence on what

happens when you raise the minimum wage. And the evidence is overwhelmingly positive: Hiking the minimum wage has little or no adverse effect on employment while significantly increasing workers' earnings".

The reason lies in the core assumptions of the standard model in Economics 101. In the "standard model", firms are assumed to be working in a one-sector, perfectly competitive market. As Cornell University's professor of economics Gary Fields argued, the effects of decreased labour in the theoretical one-sector market "do not carry over" when the analysis is expanded to include multiple sectors.

The assumption of a perfectly competitive labour markets is also problematic. When there is a "monopsony" power (that is, employers having more market power than workers), a minimum wage can increase both wages and employment. This has led some proponents of minimum wage, like Professor Krugman, to suggest that minimum wages are in effect a guard against unfair labour exploitation.

Finally, the standard economic model simplifies many complex interactions within employers and employees. If one considers principal-agent problem and other information asymmetries, non-rational decisions, and concepts of fairness and justice in resources allocation, the explanatory value of standard economic model falls even further.

This has prompted Professor Joseph Stiglitz, another Nobel laureate in economics, to argue that free markets often lead to sub-optimal outcomes, and that the "market-clearing equilibrium" is only an expression of a theoretical outcome, not an ideal that should be pursued.

All this does not mean that the opposites of the two claims above are true. Ultimately, the questions are empirical ones. To shut out the possibility that some restrictions on trade or a minimum wage might be good would be an example of what Professor James Kwak of the University of Connecticut calls "economism", an acceptance of ideas that are backed up only by simple economic theory but which do not have much empirical validity.

The late Prof Samuelson famously wrote: "I don't care who writes a nation's laws – or crafts its advanced treatises – if I can write its economics textbooks."

The way economics is taught has always had a major impact on public discourse. But if our discourse is based only on the introductory economics we were taught at school, we run the risk of elevating Economics 101 into an ideology when, in fact, it should simply be a starting point for us to understand how the economy really works.

The coming days of discussion about Budget 2019 should not just be a presentation of what the Government plans to do. Hopefully, it will be an opportunity for active citizens to question standard economic assumptions, ask for empirical verification, and challenge the presumption that the Government knows (economics) best.

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Keeping the powder dry with an eye on the future

Arup Raha

For The Straits Times

A few days before Singapore's 2019 Budget was announced, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat noted in an interview that any Budget should not be looked at in isolation. It should be seen within the context of previous Budgets. He couldn't have been more correct. While a Budget is ostensibly about dollars and cents – how to raise funds; how to spend funds – it is ultimately a strategy document about an economy's future.

For Singapore, the main goals of that strategy have been to keep Singaporeans safe and secure, deal with economic transformation and a changing global environment, and to continue building an inclusive and caring society. And, of course, to do all these while

maintaining fiscal prudence.

In my opinion, the 2019 Budget does all that and more.

First, the Budget arithmetic or the fiscal soundness bit. For FY18, a Budget surplus of \$2.1 billion is expected versus an initial expectation of a \$0.6 billion deficit. The better-than-expected outcome is, to some extent, due to better revenue intake and also because the large spending on the anticipated high-speed rail link to Kuala Lumpur was postponed. Similarly, for FY19, even though a deficit of \$3.5 billion is projected, history suggests that the end outcome is likely to be better. But even if that does not happen, there are several positives to be noted.

The deficit is expected to be financed from previous surpluses and thus there should not be any impact on interest rates. Barring sharp global rate increases – very unlikely in my view – local rates should remain capped for now.

Second, even though the Budget is mildly expansionary, most of the fiscal powder has been kept dry. With accumulated surpluses from previous years at close to \$14 billion to \$15 billion, there is scope for countercyclical measures should the global economy pose greater downside risks than anticipated.

Macro stability, the most necessary of conditions for any other policy measure to succeed, remains solidly in place.

There are several measures that will continue to build a more inclusive society with better social safety nets. The \$6.1 billion Merdeka Generation Package (along with the \$1.1 billion Bicentennial Bonus) is especially welcome, but one should recognise that this is not an end but a journey. With an ageing population, similar measures will be required in the future and that means there will be a need for greater revenue collection. Within that context, the

2018 Budget had a proposed goods and services tax increase. While this year's Budget does not have any revenue-enhancing measure of such significance, it is possible that future Budgets will need to again focus on revenue sources.

To an economist, the most interesting part of the Budget is the focus on economic transformation.

Mr Heng started his speech recognising the role Singapore's port has played by making it a trading centre, and later a global node. Given Singapore's size, that is also Singapore's future. Yet, that source of growth is under greater threat than ever before.

While the current concerns are about a slowing global economy and trade wars, there are also structural reasons to be concerned about trade. Global trade growth, especially in goods, has been under stress for close to a decade, with the ratio of global trade growth to gross domestic product growth averaging

close to one, down from a ratio of over two in the preceding decade.

There are several reasons for this.

First, China is in a structural slowdown. Second, value chains have matured, thus reducing the share on intermediate goods in global trade flows.

Lastly, the share of goods in global trade is also decreasing.

History suggests, though, that trade volumes go the way transaction costs go. Trade booms have typically been preceded by a decline in trading costs, be they the earlier booms that came from containerisation and the lowering of shipping costs, or the boom period in the early 2000s that came from developments in information and communications technology and the setting up of value chains.

In short, the future growth areas are likely to be trade in services and data, for digitisation is fast lowering costs in both these areas. To succeed, there needs to not only be

investment in knowledge but also the regulatory complementarities that go with it.

It is here that the 2019 Budget comes out trumps. The look at the future is clear-eyed and the list of measures to embrace the future is long and impressive.

Since about mid-2016, productivity growth has been rising. The continued support to small and medium-sized enterprises to foster innovation and incentives to invest in skills and training should ensure that continues. Besides, there is real commitment to continue to develop Singapore as an innovation and technology hub.

There is much to applaud in this Budget. There is a focus on the future, laying out a strategy to move towards the kind of society Singaporeans aspire for themselves. Yet, there is recognition of short-term external risks and the consequent maintenance of policy space to counter that, if needed.

• Dr Arup Raha is an economist based in Singapore. He has previously been the chief economist for Asia at several global banks.



A march organised by officials and far-right nationalist groups marking the 100th anniversary of Polish independence in Warsaw in November last year. The fear of terrorism, along with the refugee crisis, has produced a surge in support for nationalist and Islamophobic parties in Europe. PHOTO: REUTERS

Islamophobia and the new clash of civilisations

Gideon Rachman

It is now getting on for 20 years since the attacks on New York and Washington on Sept 11, 2001, and the idea that international politics should be organised around a “war on terror” is no longer fashionable. But suspicion and hatred of the Muslim world, inflamed by 9/11, have not faded with the passage of time.

On the contrary, Islamophobia, as it is often called, is now a central part of politics in most of the world’s major power centres – from the US and the European Union, to China and India.

At the same time, countries that were once seen as strongholds of moderate Islam – in particular, Turkey, Indonesia and Pakistan – are witnessing a rise in radical Islamism. The overall picture is that both the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds are becoming increasingly intolerant in their attitudes towards each other, with politicians more and more inclined to pander to fear-driven views of the world.

The most startling recent development has been China’s decision to imprison more than one million Uighur Muslims in the north-western province of Xinjiang in mass internment camps, in an effort to “re-educate” them.

This policy seems to be a wildly exaggerated response to a relatively minor threat of domestic terrorism, combined with the Communist Party’s increasing paranoia about social, political and regional conformity. The internment process has been unfolding since early 2017 and is belatedly attracting international condemnation.

A United Nations human rights panel has called on China to release illegally detained Uighurs. And, this month, Turkey became the first major Muslim nation officially to condemn Beijing’s policy towards the community.

The outside world’s slowness to respond to China’s actions in Xinjiang stems partly from a reluctance to antagonise the emerging superpower. But it may also reflect an increasingly hostile attitude to Muslim minorities in other parts of the world.

India, Asia’s other emerging superpower, has been governed by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for almost five years. BJP militants make little secret of the fact that they regard Islam as alien to India.

About 14 per cent of the Indian population is Muslim, but there was not a single Muslim among the 282 BJP members elected to the national Parliament in 2014. The fear of Islamist terrorism in India has surged following a suicide bombing in Kashmir that killed 44 paramilitary police. With elections looming, an increase in communal tensions seems likely.

Anti-Muslim sentiment has also



Pakistani activists of the Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan party welcoming its leader Khadim Hussain Rizvi as he arrived at an anti-terrorist court during a hearing in Lahore on Monday, following earlier protests against the acquittal of a Christian from blasphemy charges. Islamists in Pakistan are using blasphemy laws as a weapon to persecute religious minorities and political opponents, says the writer. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



Right-wing Hindu supporters demanding a speedy final verdict on the building of a Hindu temple on the ruins of a 16th-century mosque in Ayodhya, India, last month. PHOTO: REUTERS

flared up in Myanmar, where more than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims were forced to flee the country by army offensives, amid reports of rape and murder. Most are now living as refugees in neighbouring Bangladesh.

The plight of Muslim refugees, however, is not a particularly popular cause in the West.

Since 9/11, many more American civilians have fallen victim to school shootings than to Islamist terrorists, but anti-Muslim rhetoric by politicians has become more pronounced. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, then US President George W. Bush visited a mosque and asserted that “Islam is peace”; 15 years later, President Donald Trump won the presidency after campaigning to ban all Muslims from entering the US.

In recent years, Islamist terrorism has hit Europe far more frequently than the US, with France suffering particularly badly. The fear of terrorism, combined with the arrival of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa,

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, there were endless discussions about a “clash of civilisations” between the Muslim and the non-Muslim worlds. It is no longer quite so fashionable to discuss the concept. But something that looks strikingly like a “clash of civilisations” is emerging nonetheless.

has produced a surge in support for nationalist and Islamophobic parties. Parties that campaigned against Muslim immigration are now in government in Hungary, Austria, Italy and Poland – and they are powerful opposition forces, shaping the debate, in Germany and France. The anti-Islam

radicalisation outside the Muslim world is coinciding with the rise of intolerant Islamism in some Muslim countries that used to be relatively immune from that ideology.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, once lauded in the West as the model of a modernising democrat, is increasingly despotic and given to bitter conspiracy theories about the West. Turkey’s secularists are on edge, fearing an Erdogan-driven effort to Islamise their country.

The situation has been worsening in Pakistan for decades. Islamists are using blasphemy laws as a weapon to persecute religious minorities and political opponents. Mr Salman Taseer, a former governor of the province of Punjab who spoke out against the blasphemy law, was assassinated in 2011. His murderer has become a hero of the Islamist movement. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan defends the blasphemy law.

Campaigns against blasphemy have also become a political weapon in Indonesia, the world’s most populous Muslim-majority country. Mr Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known as Ahok), a Christian and former governor of Jakarta, was imprisoned in 2017 after being convicted of blasphemy. Ahok was a protégé of Indonesian President Joko Widodo, known as Jokowi. But, running scared of the rising tide of Islamism, Mr Joko has selected a conservative Muslim cleric as his running mate in April’s presidential election.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, there were endless discussions about a “clash of civilisations” between the Muslim and the non-Muslim worlds. It is no longer quite so fashionable to discuss the concept. But something that looks strikingly like a “clash of civilisations” is emerging nonetheless. FINANCIAL TIMES

How to mend a broken nation

David Brooks

I start with the pain. A couple of times a week, I give a speech somewhere in the country about social isolation and social fragmentation. Very often, a parent comes up to me afterwards and says, “My daughter took her life when she was 14.” Or, “My son died of an overdose when he was 20.” Their eyes flood with tears. I don’t know what to say.

I squeeze a shoulder just to try to be present with them, but the crying does not stop. As it turns to weeping they rush out of the auditorium, and I am left with my own futility. What can I say to these parents? What can I say to the parents still around who don’t yet know they may soon become those parents? This kind of pain is an epidemic in US society.

When you cover the sociology beat as I do, you see other kinds of pain. The African-American woman in Greenville who is indignant because young black kids in her neighbourhood face injustice just as gross as she did in 1953. The college student in the Midwest who is convinced that she is the only one haunted by compulsive thoughts about her own worthlessness. The Trump-supporting small-business man in Louisiana who silently clenches his fists in rage as guests at a dinner party disparage his whole way of life.

These different kinds of pain share a common thread: our lack of healthy connection to one another, our inability to see the full dignity of one another, and the resulting culture of fear, distrust, tribalism, shaming and strife.

On Dec 7, 1941, countless Americans saw that their nation was in peril and walked into recruiting stations. We don’t have anything as dramatic as Pearl Harbour, but when 47,000 Americans kill themselves every year and 72,000 more die from drug addiction, isn’t that a silent Pearl Harbour? When the basic norms of decency, civility and truthfulness are under threat, isn’t that a silent Pearl Harbour?

Aren’t we all called at moments like these to do something extra? My something extra was starting something nine months ago at the Aspen Institute called Weave: The Social Fabric Project.

The first core idea was that social isolation is the problem underlying a lot of America’s other problems. The second idea was that this problem is being solved by people around the country, at the local level, who are building community and weaving the social fabric.

How can we learn from their example and nationalise their effect? We travelled around the country and found them everywhere. We’d plop into big cities like Houston and small towns like Wilkesboro, North Carolina, and we’d find 25 to 100 community “Weavers” almost immediately. This is a movement that doesn’t know it’s a movement. Some of them work at organisations: a veteran who helps other veterans with mental illnesses in New Orleans; a guy who runs a boxing gym in Appalachian Ohio, where he nominally teaches young men boxing, but really teaches them life.

Many others do their weaving in the course of everyday life – because that’s what neighbours do. One woman in Florida said she doesn’t have time to volunteer, but that’s because she spends 40 hours a week looking out for local kids and visiting sick folks in the hospital. We go into neighbourhoods and ask, “Who is trusted here?” In one neighbourhood it was the guy who collects the fees at the parking garage.

We’re living with the excesses of 60 years of hyper-individualism. There’s a lot of emphasis in American culture on personal freedom, self-interest, self-expression, the idea that life is an individual journey towards personal fulfilment. You do you. But

Weavers share an ethos that puts relationship over self. We are born into relationships, and the measure of our life is in the quality of our relationships. “We” precedes “me”.

Whether they live in red or blue America, they often use the same terms and embody the same values – deep hospitality, showing up for people, and to keep showing up.

The phrase we heard most was “the whole person”. Whether you are a teacher, a nurse or a neighbour, you have to see and touch the whole person – the trauma, the insecurities and the dreams as much as the body and the brain. But the trait that leaps out above all others is “radical mutuality”: We are all completely equal, regardless of where society ranks us. “I am broken; I need others to survive,” an after-school programme leader in Houston told us. “We don’t do things for people. We don’t do things to people. We do things with people,” said a woman who builds community for teenagers in New Orleans.

Being around these people has been one of the most uplifting experiences of my life. Obviously, it’s made me want to be more neighbourly, to be more active and intentional in how I extend care. But it has also changed my moral lens. I’ve become impatient with the politicians I cover. They are so self-absorbed!

Social scientists tell us that selfishness is natural, people are motivated by money, power and status. But Weavers are not motivated by any of these things. They want to live in right relation with others and to serve the community good. Their example has shown me that we don’t just have a sociological problem; we have a moral problem.

We all create a shared moral ecology through the daily decisions of our lives. When we stereotype, abuse, impugn motives and lie about one another, we’ve ripped the social fabric and encouraged more ugliness.

When we love across boundaries, listen patiently, see deeply and make someone feel known, we’ve woven it and reinforced generosity.

So the big question is: How do we take the success the Weavers are having on the local level and make it national? The Weavers are building relationships one by one, which takes time. Relationships do not scale. But norms scale.

If you can change the culture, you can change behaviour on a large scale. If you can change the lens through which people see the world, as these Weavers have changed mine, then you can change the way people want to be in the world and act in the world.

So that’s our job. To shift the culture so that it emphasises individualism less and relationalism more.

Culture changes when a small group of people, often on the margins of society, find a better way to live, and other people begin to copy them. These Weavers have found a better way to live. We at Weave – and all of us – need to illuminate their example, synthesise their values so we understand what it means to be a relationalist and not an individualist. We need to create a shared Weaver identity.

In 1960, few people called themselves feminists. By 1980, millions did. Just creating that social identity and that sense of mutual purpose is an act of great power. I guess my ask is that you declare your own personal declaration of interdependence and decide to become a Weaver instead of a ripper.

This is partly about communication. Every time you assault and stereotype a person, you’ve ripped the social fabric. Every time you see that person deeply and make her or him feel known, you’ve woven it.

Renewal is building, relationship by relationship, community by community. It will spread and spread, as the sparks fly upward. NYTIMES

We’re living with the excesses of 60 years of hyper-individualism. There’s a lot of emphasis in American culture on personal freedom, self-interest, self-expression, the idea that life is an individual journey towards personal fulfilment. You do you. But Weavers share an ethos that puts relationship over self. We are born into relationships, and the measure of our life is in the quality of our relationships. “We” precedes “me”.

BIG PICTURE



WEATHER

Windy, with passing showers in the afternoon.
High 34 deg C **Low** 24 deg C
24-hr PSI as of 5pm yesterday: 47 to 53 (Moderate)



PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

They'll be coming round the mountain

It was a winding road into the mountains for the competitors in the 2019 Tour of Oman bicycle race on Monday.
The third stage of the race was a gruelling 192km route that took cyclists through steep climbs from Shati al-Qurm to Qurayyat.

Kazakh cyclist Alexey Lutsenko, who was the overall champion last year, finished ahead of the pack. It was his second stage victory since the race started last Saturday, putting the 26-year-old on track to repeat last year's success.
The race ends tomorrow.

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B| HOME



KEVIN WONG
NEW HEART GIVES 29-YEAR-OLD SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE AND A NEW MISSION **B6**

Picture book to teach kids about caring



Retired First Warrant Officer Mohamed Haniffa Jainul Abitheen, 72, and retired Lieutenant-Colonel Bob Cheah, 78, at a story-telling session for pre-schoolers at the My First Skool centre in Jurong West Street 65 yesterday, as part of the pre-school's Total Defence Day commemoration. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

President Halimah launches book to be distributed to 141 My First Skool centres

Vanessa Liu

No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.

That is the central message of Start Small Dream Big Caring For Others, a 21-page picture book that teaches pre-schoolers simple everyday actions to care for their family members, their teachers and

RESOURCE ON LANGUAGE AND VALUES

Children these days might have a limited knowledge of their mother tongues if the people around them do not use the languages much. We hope this book can be a useful resource for teachers and parents to teach linguistic abilities and impart values at the same time to the children.



MS THIAN AI LING, general manager of My First Skool.

friends, the community, as well as animals and the environment.

The book was launched by President Halimah Yacob yesterday at My First Skool (MFS) in Jurong West Street 65.

It is available in four languages – English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil – and copies will be distributed to every MFS centre in Singapore by next month. It was conceptualised and written by MFS early childhood educators.

The book is a collaboration between MFS and the Early Childhood Development Agency. It is part of the Start Small Dream Big movement, an initiative by the agency to encourage closer partnerships among pre-schools, families and the wider community.

The book launch was held in conjunction with the pre-school's commemoration of Total Defence Day, which falls on Feb 15 every year to mark the day Singapore fell to the Japanese in 1942.

Among those who attended the event were an MP for West Coast GRC, Mr Patrick Tay; Singapore Armed Forces veterans; seniors

from NTUC Health Silver Circle (Jurong West); as well as MFS teachers and pre-schoolers.

Ms Thian Ai Ling, general manager of MFS, said: "Other pillars of Total Defence, such as military defence or psychological defence, might be concepts too difficult for pre-school children to understand. So we tend to focus on social defence."

"Social defence is about how people of different races come together to care for one another, and this book sits right in that same concept of caring for others."

MFS has 141 centres islandwide, and is one of many pre-school brands under NTUC First Campus, the second largest pre-school operator in Singapore.

Ms Thian said the book can also be used to inculcate in pre-schoolers an appreciation of their mother tongues.

"Children these days might have a limited knowledge of their mother tongues if the people around them do not use the languages much. We hope this book can be a useful resource for teachers and parents to teach linguistic abilities and impart values at the same time to the children."

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Man arrested over fake \$50 note for Grab ride

Ng Huiwen

A 25-year-old man was arrested on Monday for allegedly using a fake \$50 note to pay for a Grab ride.

The police said in a statement yesterday that a private-hire car driver reported at about 10pm on Feb 12 that she received the fake note as payment.

She told Shin Min Daily News on Feb 11 that she had picked up a passenger in Yishun Avenue 11 on Feb 9. On arriving in Marsiling Rise, the passenger claimed he had no money for the fare and asked a friend for help.

According to a screenshot provided by the driver, the fare was \$15, including a \$4 surcharge.

About five minutes later, a man appeared and gave the driver a \$50 note.

The 47-year-old driver, who gave

her name as Ms Huang, noticed that there were no security features on the note and rejected it.

She returned the fake note to the passenger and lodged a police report.

Officers from the Commercial Affairs Department and the Woodlands Police Division arrested the suspect in Marsiling Rise at about 2pm on Monday.

The man was found with fake \$100 notes in his possession.

The police seized the fake \$100 notes, a colour printer and a mobile phone for investigations.

The suspect will be charged today.

If convicted of counterfeiting currency notes, he may be jailed for up to 20 years and fined.

Anyone found guilty of trying to pass off fake notes as genuine ones may also face a jail term of up to 20 years and fined. Those convicted of

possessing fake notes may be jailed for up to 15 years and fined.

In the statement, the police reminded the public to adopt the following measures if they suspect that they have received a fake currency note:

- Report the incident at the nearest neighbourhood police centre.
- If the suspect is around, delay him and call the police immediately.
- Take note of the suspect's details, including gender, race, age, height, build, clothing, tattoo, language or dialect spoken, as well as those of any companion.
- Note the vehicle registration number of the suspect, if any.
- Limit the handling of the suspected note and place it in a protective covering, such as an envelope, to prevent further tampering. Hand it over to the police immediately.

Information on the security features of genuine Singapore currency is available on the Monetary Authority of Singapore's website.

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ROTARY DAY

Saturday 23 February 2019

Rotary People of Action in Singapore

On 23rd of February, Rotarians from District 3310 comprising of 23 clubs in Singapore, 2 in Brunei and 46 in parts of Malaysia (Johor, Malacca, Sarawak, Labuan FT and Sabah) will celebrate our shared vision for peace and humanitarian activities. This is also World Understanding and Peace Day where Rotarians worldwide celebrate 114 years of Rotary International, an international service organization with this mission to provide service to others, promote integrity, and advance world understanding, goodwill and peace through our fellowship of business, professional, and community leaders.

Join us in an array of activities by Rotary People of Action in Singapore on this Special Rotary Day! #rotarydistrict3310. www.rotary.org

Rotary Family Day

Time: 9am to 2pm

Venue: Toa Payoh Central CC Level 2

Zumba, Blood Pressure Measurement, Blood Sugar Tests, FIT KIT Distribution Colorectal Cancer Screening, Health Talks – Stroke Prevention, Cancer Prevention, TCM Health Management, Magic and Puppet Shows, Fun Games, Paper Making – Love our Mother Earth, Popcorns and Balloons giveaways, Cultural Shows. Harley Davidson Photo Station.

Complete any 5 stations and Redeem a Free Prize from 12pm to 2pm.
Free Loaf of Bread: For first 300 seniors aged 50 and above only
Other Attractive Prizes for participants 49 and below
Limited Redemption Gift – 1 per participant. While Stocks Last.
For further information call the hotline at 61008138

WUPD Dinner

World Understanding and Peace Day Dinner

Time: 6.30pm to 11pm

Venue: Holiday Inn Atrium, Havelock

Ticketed event for Rotarians and Friends to celebrate Rotary Day with live streaming across 71 Rotary clubs in District 3310 and live streaming address by Rotary International President Barry Rasin.

"Yumcha" with the elderly

Time: 10am to 12.30pm

Venue: St Hilda's Community Centre

Song, Dance, Games and Food for the elderly in Kampong Arang.

Conversations

Presented by Interact Coordinating Committee

Time: 1pm to 4pm

Venue: Raffles Institution

An event for interactors to gain insights into the lives of those who do great things every day!

Rotary Rocks!

A battle of the bands

by Professionals: Architects, Doctors, Lawyers and Valuers

Time: 5.30pm to 9pm

Venue: Timbre at Substation

Entry Ticket: \$40. Proceeds to Tasek Jurong for access to education for the under privileged youths. Enquiries: rotaryclubofpandanvalley@gmail.com

Rotary



PEOPLE OF ACTION

In-flight entertainment cameras are not in use: SIA

It says screens with the devices installed are provided by the manufacturers, no plans for any use of the cameras

Karamjit Kaur
Senior Aviation Correspondent

Singapore Airlines (SIA) has reassured passengers that small cameras attached to the in-flight entertainment system on some of its planes are not being used.

Some customers were concerned that they were being monitored as they watched movies and used other entertainment options on their journeys.

However, an SIA spokesman told The Straits Times: "The camera is permanently disabled and cannot be activated on board."

The in-flight entertainment systems installed with a camera are manufactured by Panasonic and Thales, and can be found on the Airbus 350, A-380, Boeing 777-300ER and B787-10 planes, the airline said.

"These newer in-flight entertainment screens and handsets are provided by the original equipment manufacturers," the spokesman said.

"Do allow us to reiterate that we have no plans to enable or develop any features using the cameras."

The same Avant in-flight entertainment system developed by French aerospace firm Thales has been ordered or installed on more than 1,600 aircraft by major carriers, Thales says on its website.

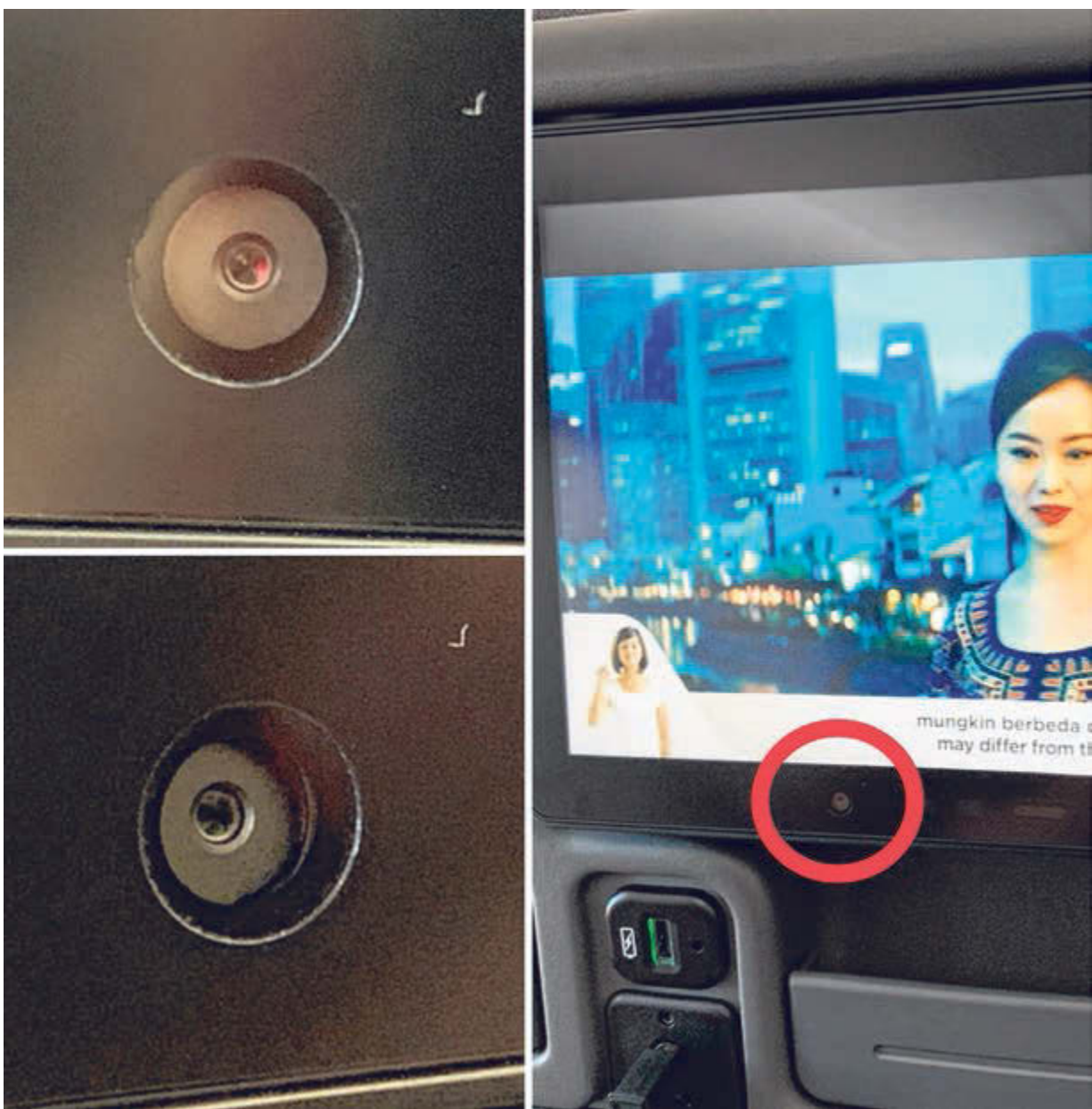
They include Japan Airlines, Emirates, American Airlines, China Southern Airlines and Hainan Airlines.

Passenger Vitaly Kamluk, who spotted the camera on a recent SIA flight, said in a tweet: "Just found this interesting sensor looking at me from the seat back on board of Singapore Airlines."

"Any expert opinion of whether this (is) a camera? Perhaps @SingaporeAir could clarify how it is used?"

The airline replied to him with the same assurance that "there are no plans to develop any features using the cameras".

SIA added: "We would like to share that some of our newer in-flight entertainment systems pro-



Passenger Vitaly Kamluk spotted the camera in the in-flight entertainment system on a recent Singapore Airlines flight. PHOTO: TWITTER/VITALY KAMLUK

PERMANENTLY DISABLED

The camera is permanently disabled and cannot be activated on board.



SIA SPOKESMAN

vided by the original equipment manufacturers do have a camera embedded in the hardware."

Still, some suggested that the cameras should be physically covered up.

"I'm sure you could put us at ease by covering the cameras. I'm sure you can find some small Singapore Airlines stickers to put on (them)," wrote Twitter user Kate.

For safety and security reasons, most aircraft are equipped with surveillance cameras.

For example, there are cameras outside the cockpit that allow pilots to check the area before they unlock the door for cabin crew members and other staff to enter.

There are also cameras to monitor the rest of the aircraft cabin, if necessary.

There is typically a control switch at the back of the plane that cabin crew can activate to allow pilots to view what is happening.

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Former DPP chief Benjamin Pwee applies to join SDP

Linette Lai
Political Correspondent

Former Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) secretary-general Benjamin Pwee has applied to join the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP).

Last night, SDP's vice-chairman John Tan told The Straits Times that the party's central executive committee will meet early next month to

go through his application.

Earlier yesterday, Mr Pwee said in a Facebook post he and his team decided to do so "after much internal discussion and considerations".

"We share and believe in the values and ideals that SDP stands for, and they have many other like-minded credible people," he wrote.

"We also believe in their organisational resources and capabilities as a longstanding political party."

The SDP, founded in 1980 by veteran politician Chiam See Tong, is led by Mr Chee Soon Juan.

Earlier this month, Mr Pwee said he was leaving the DPP to join a "bigger, more effective" party, but he did not disclose the party's name.

He also spoke then of the importance of having other opposition members "consolidate behind a few key established credible leaders" so that at least one-third of Parliament will have opposition representation.

Yesterday, he told The Straits Times the team applying to join the SDP includes DPP members and new faces who are his friends.

As team leader, he is the first to resign from the DPP and apply to the SDP "to show the way", he said.

If accepted, Mr Pwee said, he will

be guided by the decisions of SDP's leadership.

SDP's Mr Tan said it is important that Singaporeans who join the party believe in its values, and added: "We have met Mr Pwee and are happy to note that he believes in these values, too."

Mr Pwee contested the 2011 General Election under the banner of Mr Chiam's Singapore People's Party (SPP), and in 2013, took the helm at the DPP.

In the 2015 polls, he and then chairman Hamim Aliyas quit the DPP to contest Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC as SPP candidates. Both went back to DPP after the election. Mr Hamim is now the DPP's secretary-general.

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SHARED IDEALS

We share and believe in the values and ideals that SDP stands for, and they have many other like-minded credible people. We also believe in their organisational resources and capabilities as a longstanding political party.



MR BENJAMIN PWEE, former Democratic Progressive Party secretary-general on the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), which he has applied to join.

TOTO

Hong Bao Draw
Group 1 Prize snowballed to
\$13.6 Million

Draw on Fri, 22 Feb 2019, 9.30pm
at Singapore Pools Building
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MRT train evacuated after phone emits smoke

Toh Ting Wei

A train at Dhoby Ghaut MRT station was evacuated yesterday, after smoke was spotted coming out of a passenger's mobile phone.

The cause of the smoke was probably accidental and electrical in origin, said the Singapore Civil Defence (SCDF), which was called in to help investigate the phone after the incident.

No fire or injuries were reported in the incident, which happened on the North-East Line, said rail operator SBS Transit.

Passengers were evacuated as a precaution, said Ms Tammy Tan, senior vice-president of corporate communications at SBS Transit.

The SCDF and the Public Transport Security Command were also activated as a safety measure in response to the incident, said SBS.

The SCDF said its help was not required at the station.

The affected train was sent back to the depot.

A Straits Times reader, who declined to be named, said he was in the train and standing about 1m away from the owner of the phone, when smoke starting coming out of the device, which was in the man's



A mobile phone started smoking in a train heading towards Dhoby Ghaut MRT station on the North-East Line yesterday, resulting in the evacuation of the train. THE NEW PAPER FILE PHOTO

backpocket.

The train was moving towards Dhoby Ghaut MRT station.

"The phone owner was just chatting with another two friends. But suddenly, he struggled to retrieve his phone, before throwing it down onto the floor," he said. "Thick smoke was coming out from the phone, but there was no fire."

He said the phone burned a slight hole in the owner's pocket, and the owner had soot on his hand after the incident.

At Dhoby Ghaut MRT station, passengers disembarked and two

station staff helped move the crowd safely out of the train, he said.

It is believed that the phone model was an Honor, a smartphone brand under Huawei.

Mr Larry Yeung, 31, who was also on board the train, said: "Everything seemed normal, but after the train doors closed, they opened again."

"The train stopped for about a minute or so, and soon after, the announcement came to request that all passengers get off the train."

Mr Yeung, who works with design methodologies to solve prob-

lems, said the reason for the announcement was not stated and that commuters were calm throughout the entire incident.

The train then left the station.

While the disembarkation of the train meant that the platform was "very crowded", Mr Yeung said that there were no delays affecting the line and the subsequent train came in about 1½ minutes.

"I was lucky to get on the next train, but I saw that some didn't manage to get in," he added.

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Minister gives details of CPF retirement payouts

For Life or Retirement Sum schemes, 75% receive under \$500 a month but younger cohorts expected to get more

Linette Lai
Political Correspondent

Nearly three-quarters of those getting monthly payouts from the Central Provident Fund (CPF) Life scheme or Retirement Sum Scheme receive less than \$500 a month, said Manpower Minister Josephine Teo.

But younger cohorts are expected to get higher payouts, given “increased labour force participation and improvements to the CPF system made in the past decade”,

she added. For example, about six in 10 active members who turned 55 in 2017 had, at least, the basic retirement sum of \$83,000 in their Retirement Accounts.

This sum will give them a monthly payout of between \$700 and \$750 for life, she said.

Mrs Teo made the point on Monday in a written parliamentary reply to Nominated MP Walter The-seira, who wanted, among other things, a breakdown of average monthly payouts under both schemes.

Last December, there were about

268,000 CPF members aged 65 and older who were getting retirement payouts from either of the two schemes, Mrs Teo said.

She added that three-quarters were property owners, 54 per cent of whom owned four-room or larger Housing Board flats.

Some 29 per cent owned three-room or smaller flats, while 17 per cent owned private properties.

Mrs Teo also said the average monthly payout varies greatly among people from different age groups.

The payout for those aged 65 to 69, for instance, is more than double that of those aged 80 to 87.

In Parliament on Monday, Mrs Teo also fielded questions from several MPs who had asked if the CPF

Who gets what under Retirement Sum Scheme or CPF Life

Age band	No. of members	Average monthly payout
65-69	116,000	\$450
70-79	130,000	\$290
80-87	19,000	\$220

NOTES:
*CPF members aged 87 in 2018 belong to the first cohort of members under the Retirement Sum Scheme. CPF members aged 88 and above in 2018 were not part of the Retirement Sum Scheme and were able to withdraw their CPF Savings in full at age 55.
**Figures are for December 2018.

Source: Ministry of Communications and Information
STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Board could allow automatic payouts when a member turns 65.

They raised these questions after a photo of a CPF Board letter advising the recipient about his payout options on turning 65 went viral on social media last month.

The photo led some people to mistakenly conclude that the payout

Younger cohorts are expected to get higher payouts, given “increased labour force participation and improvements to the CPF system made in the past decade”, said Manpower Minister Josephine Teo.

age had been raised to 70, while others thought that if they did not apply to start receiving payouts at age 65, the next time they could do so would be at 70 years old.

Mrs Teo said there will be no change in the existing policy. CPF members can continue to choose to start monthly payouts at 65, or defer them to any time between 65 and 70.

She added that payouts will not automatically start at 65 as this would deprive members of the benefits of keeping their money in their CPF accounts.

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Biggest supermoon rounds off Chinese New Year



The supermoon seen next to the Singapore Flyer and as a backdrop to the Flower Clock, one of the exhibits for the iLight Singapore Bicentennial Edition, in the foreground.
ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG

Ng Huiwen

Many people in Singapore kept their eyes peeled for the supermoon last night, when the full moon was said to be the biggest and brightest this year.

The supermoon coincided with the annual Lantern Festival, which marked the 15th and final day of Chinese New Year celebrations, or “chap goh meh” in Hokkien.

Many astronomy enthusiasts, photographers and curious crowds flocked to Bedok Jetty, and had their cameras pointed at the sky, even before the supermoon was visible from about 7.30pm.

Lecturer Jeffrey Fang, 40, told The Straits Times that he was taking a stroll at the jetty at about 7pm when he noticed that the moon was “rounder than usual”.

He said: “I went out for a walk as it was the Lantern Festival and I was pleasantly surprised to see the supermoon.”

Mr Fang found out it was a supermoon only after his friends discussed it on social media.

He said he stayed past 9pm to admire the moon set against the changing colour of the sky, while sipping some wine.

A bout of cloudy weather, which obscured the moon for about half an hour till 8.30pm, did not deter him and many others.

A Science Centre Singapore spokesman had said earlier that if the sky was clear, the best time to view the phenomenon would be at moonrise at around 7.30pm.

The best places to see it included East Coast Park and Labrador Park, which have a clear view of the east-



A supermoon, at 8.29pm last night, above a street lamp at Bedok Jetty. It coincided with the annual Lantern Festival, which marked the 15th and final day of Chinese New Year celebrations. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

ern horizon.

Social media users in countries such as Thailand and Japan also shared their sightings of the supermoon online.

A supermoon occurs when the Moon is closest to the Earth in its orbit at the same time that it is full. This causes the moon to appear bigger and brighter in the night sky.

While a supermoon’s brightness is dependent on Singapore’s weather conditions, it will look slightly larger when compared with

full moons in other months or with objects on the ground nearby, said the Science Centre spokesman.

Its colour may also change if the Earth’s atmosphere has more water vapour or smoke particles.

Another supermoon will light up the sky on March 21. While this will be smaller than the one last night, it will be significantly larger than the smallest full moon of the year, said the spokesman.

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A supermoon occurs when the Moon is closest to the Earth in its orbit at the same time that it is full. This causes the moon to appear bigger and brighter in the night sky.

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Past warning has no impact on sentencing: High Court

Court clarifies that it will consider past conviction, but not warning, when deciding punishment for other offences

K.C. Vijayan
Senior Law Correspondent

Unlike a prior conviction, a conditional stern warning cannot be factored in during sentencing for other offences, the High Court has clarified in a case involving a former undergraduate who molested his classmate and peeped at another student.

The 26-year-old had touched his 24-year-old classmate while she was asleep in April 2017.

This happened just two months after he was administered a conditional stern warning by the police for peeping into a bathroom cubicle at a 22-year-old undergraduate in November 2015. Both offences occurred on campus and all names were redacted in judgment grounds

delivered last week.

Under the terms of the warning he received, the man was to ensure he did not commit any offence within 12 months of the warning being administered. But he did.

As a result, he was charged in court for the peeping offence as well as for the molestation offence.

When it came to sentencing him for the molestation offence, the district court took as aggravating factor the fact that he was serving a conditional stern warning for peeping.

In the judgment grounds, Justice See Kee Oon said the peeping offence cannot be taken as an antecedent as the man was "not charged, much less convicted and sentenced" for it until he was also charged for the outraging modesty offence.

He said the warnings are a signal

that reoffending will lead to the accused person being prosecuted for the offence he had been warned for, and not as "discrete aggravating factors in sentencing".

The former student had pleaded guilty and was convicted in a district court last year for the peeping offence, for which he was sentenced to one month's jail. For the second offence, he received eight months' jail and three strokes of the cane. A third charge of criminal trespass was taken into consideration.

In the High Court appeal last month, the man's lawyer Tan Hee Joek had argued his sentences were manifestly excessive. Among other things, he said the district judge had erred in treating as an aggravating factor the fact that the man had reoffended while serving the 12-month conditional stern warning.

Mr Tan also called for caning to be set aside as precedents show caning is not always imposed even where private parts are touched.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Raja

Justice See Kee Oon noted that the man had "an extremely strong propensity for reform" but pointed out that "deterrence outweighs rehabilitation in this case". The former student, who has started serving his prison term, had his sentence changed on appeal to eight months' jail with no caning, and a fine of \$2,000.

Mohan said the district judge had rightly considered that the appellant had reoffended two months after being given the warning, and had escalated from peeping to committing molestation.

Justice See partly allowed the man's appeal for the peeping and molestation offences.

He saw no reason to disturb the eight-month jail term for the molestation conviction, saying the aggravating factor of escalation in criminal behaviour was negated by the mitigating factor of early plea of guilt.

But he set aside caning, noting there was no skin-to-skin contact or prolonged contact in the molestation case. The victim was also not restrained by the man.

As for the peeping offence, Justice See said it was not premeditated and the offender was "suddenly overcome by an inexplicable urge to peep". The judge held that the threshold for a jail term for peeping was therefore not crossed and replaced the one-month jail sentence with a \$2,000 fine.

He noted that the man had "an extremely strong propensity for reform" but pointed out that "deterrence outweighs rehabilitation in this case".

The former student, who has started serving his prison term, had his sentence changed on appeal to eight months' jail with no caning, and a fine of \$2,000.

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Man injured after accident with minibus; driver arrested

A 46-year-old man was taken conscious to Khoo Teck Puat Hospital after he was hit by a minibus on Monday morning.

The police were alerted to the accident in Mandai Road at 8.52am.

The male driver was arrested for driving a vehicle without the owner's consent. He also does not possess a valid driving licence, the police said.

A photo sent by an eyewitness to Chinese-language broadsheet Shin Min Daily News showed the victim, who appeared to be a foreign

worker, wearing a company uniform.

He crossed the road several times shortly before the accident, the paper reported.

Shin Min said the minibus driver knew the owner of the vehicle but did not have the owner's permission to drive the bus that day.

Eyewitness Qiu Guoxing told Shin Min that six medical personnel from a nearby army camp attended to the victim at the scene.

Choo Yun Ting

A 46-year-old man was taken to hospital after he was hit by a minibus on Monday.

Six medical personnel from a nearby army camp attended to the victim at the scene.

PHOTO: SHIN MIN DAILY NEWS READER



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Teacher **Brandon** graduated with a first-class honours degree in English literature from Nanyang Technological University and qualified for the dean's list. A teacher at The Write Corner, he values critical and inventive thinking in both reading and writing.



Teacher **Abigail** is an English language major at the National University of Singapore. She has taught and designed English curricula at MOE schools and reputable learning centres. She enjoys breaking down challenging literary techniques into digestible writing techniques for students to apply in their compositions.

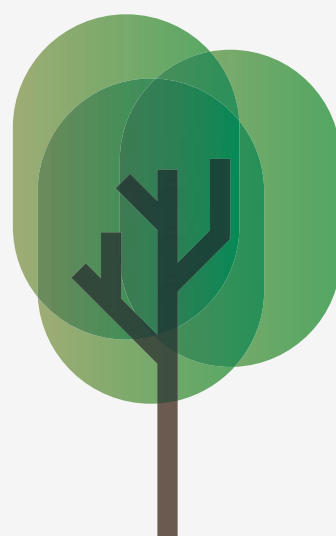
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NTU signs MOU with University of California

Partnership will expand collaboration, further exchange of faculty and students

Toh Ting Wei

The Nanyang Technological University (NTU) will partner with the University of California (UC) system to expand collaboration between the two institutions.

Under a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that spans five years, NTU and US-based UC will explore activities to further the exchange of faculty and students, the universities said yesterday.

The two institutions will also explore joint research efforts in areas that include climate change, health, technology and innovation.

The UC is a system of 10 campuses, five medical centres, three affiliated national laboratories and a statewide agriculture and natural re-

sources programme.

Professor Subra Suresh, president of NTU, said both universities are globally recognised for research, education, innovation and commitment to societal impact. "By combining our strengths and by deepening our collaboration, we can magnify this impact to address a number of global challenges," he added.

He signed the agreement on behalf of NTU, while UC president Janet Napolitano represented UC.

Professor Napolitano and her delegation were in Singapore on a two-day visit that ended yesterday.

On Monday, she gave a lecture and participated in a dialogue attended by about 300 students, faculty and members of the public.

"I am excited to be in Singapore this week to explore new opportuni-

ties for UC to collaborate with leading higher education institutions such as NTU Singapore," she said.

"With its teaching, research and public service mission, the University of California is committed to boldly confronting the most pressing global challenges. Establishing robust international partnerships is critical to this effort."

NTU said the MOU builds on the university's existing academic and research collaborations with UC campuses such as UC Berkeley, UC Davis and UC Irvine.

According to NTU, about 180 students participate in academic exchanges in the US annually.

Another 175 students take part in exchange programmes at US partner-universities under the Global Engineering Education Exchange network that enables undergraduate engineering students to study and do internships abroad.

twto@sph.com.sg



University of California president Janet Napolitano and Nanyang Technological University president Subra Suresh yesterday signed a memorandum of understanding that spans five years. The two institutions will explore joint research efforts in areas that include climate change, health, technology and innovation. PHOTO: NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

Brawl at football match lands two in hospital

David Sun

A friendly football match on Sunday between two amateur sides ended on a bloody note, landing two players in hospital.

A video of the aftermath shows one of the players lying on the pitch in shock, blood dripping from his nose, as other players engage in a shouting match metres away, according to a report in The New Paper yesterday.

Players are seen arguing and shoving one another in the 19-second video, with at least one person hurling vulgarities and challenging others to a fight.

There are also shouts that the injury was caused by a headbutt.

The brawl happened at the East Spring Secondary School field in Tampines on Sunday.

The teams comprised players who were Singaporean, Singapore permanent residents and Chinese nationals, according to the report.

The referee for the match, a member of the Football Referees' Association of Singapore, told Channel NewsAsia that a fracas broke out after a player executed a "flying kick" on an opponent during the game.

A spokesman for the police said they were alerted to a case of voluntarily causing hurt at 30 Tampines Street 34 at about 5pm.

Two men, aged 34 and 39, were taken conscious to Changi General Hospital.

Investigations are ongoing.

The pitch had been booked privately through ActiveSG, which manages several sports facilities under the Dual-Use Scheme, including the East Spring Secondary School field.

A spokesman for Sport Singapore, which oversees ActiveSG, said it was aware of the incident.

"It is a shame that what was presumably meant to be a fun game culminated in a physical dispute," the spokesman said.



A video shared on social media shows players arguing and shoving one another after a fight broke out at a privately organised friendly football match at the East Spring Secondary School field in Tampines on Sunday.

"We are unable to release any further details as investigations are under way."

Former national footballer R. Sasikumar, 43, who runs a sports marketing firm, told The New Pa-

per that violence on the pitch at social-sporting events has been a growing trend in recent years.

He said: "There's a lot of testosterone, and all it takes is a rough tackle and someone feels unfairly

treated and decides to take things into their own hands.

"The players involved will live to regret their actions."

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500 firms adopt Tafep guidelines on hiring freelancers

Adrian Lim

Late payments and contractual disputes are a major concern for self-employed persons such as freelance photographers or producers.

But there is hope that such disputes may be minimised, with close to 500 companies here committing to a set of guidelines on best practices for engaging freelance services, according to Manpower Minister Josephine Teo.

The firms, including media agencies and insurance companies, have adopted the Tripartite Standards for Contracting With Self-employed Persons, which was launched in March last year.

With the standards, firms have to discuss and agree with freelancers on terms of engagement, such as the range of services to be delivered, project timelines and payment schedules, and set them down in writing, before any work starts.

"I find the take-up very encouraging... The pool of self-employed persons that they (the companies) contract with is nearly 30,000 and this is quite considerable," Mrs Teo said last Saturday, during a visit to media agency CreativesAtWork in the One-north district.

The firm is one of the adopters of the tripartite standards.

While freelancers in the media industry are devoted to their creative craft, they are also business people, said Mrs Teo.

"They have to ensure that they are properly paid, in a timely manner. They have to ensure their commitments and obligations to their clients are properly fulfilled.

"And that means also that there must be clarity of their commitments and obligations, and that is what the tripartite standards seek to do, to promote a way of working which will help to establish these understandings upfront," she added.

This will help prevent disputes, which can potentially take up all of the creative professionals' time and divert attention away from their careers, Mrs Teo said.

Asked how the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (Tafep) en-

sures that firms which adopt the tripartite standards walk the talk, Mrs Teo said Tafep will take in feedback from freelancers and the public on these companies.

"If we find that what they declare is not consistent with their actual practice, then our next course of action will be to engage them... Perhaps there is a lack of understanding (of the standards) and we hope that through this process of engagement, they will rectify it," she said.

Ms Jayce Tham, co-founder of CreativesAtWork, said adopting the tripartite standards gives its freelancers the assurance that the terms and conditions the company offers are fair and progressive.

Ms Lydia Shah, 32, a freelance TV director and producer, said she has to deal with two to three instances of payment disputes every year.

The tripartite standards create a welcome framework and a point of reference for freelancers to discuss with companies what is fair to them, she said.

"At the same time, I would like to see some form of legislation, so companies are held accountable for any errant behaviour," she added.

adrianl@sph.com.sg

ENGAGEMENT IS KEY

If we find that what they declare is not consistent with their actual practice, then our next course of action will be to engage them... Perhaps there is a lack of understanding (of the standards) and we hope that through this process of engagement, they will rectify it.



MANPOWER MINISTER JOSEPHINE TEO, on the steps Tafep will take to ensure that the standards are upheld by companies.

BUDGET 2019

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WORD ANALYSIS

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ROUNDTABLE

Follow the discussion with industry experts led by ST associate editor Vikram Khanna on Sunday.
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HOW MUCH WILL YOU GET?

• Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat delivered his fourth Budget speech on Monday, focusing on building a strong and united nation in the face of global changes.

• Among this year's major Budget announcements were the \$6.1 billion Merdeka Generation Package for those born in the 1950s and a \$1.1 billion Bicentennial Bonus, which will benefit a wide range of citizens from lower-income individuals to parents with schoolchildren to those in their silver years.

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Despite going through many setbacks, including two strokes in 2016, Mr Kevin Wong chose to focus on goals within his control, such as working hard at rehabilitation and thinking positive. After four years and two months, he received a new heart.
ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

GRATEFUL FOR SECOND CHANCE

With a new heart, it's like a new lease of life. I can run now and I can play basketball. I feel like I'm a normal person again and I feel very grateful for a second chance.



MR KEVIN WONG, 29, whose heart woes started in 2012 at age 22. In 2016, he suffered two strokes.

GENERATION GRIT

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GenerationGrit

Beneath that smile beats a heart of courage

At the age of 22, Mr Kevin Wong had the heart of an old man that only a transplant could cure. He tells *The Straits Times* what kept him going, when years passed and no donor heart was in sight, in this series about millennials who inspire us.

Theresa Tan
Senior Social Affairs
Correspondent

Mr Kevin Wong, 29, is not one to dwell on his woes.

But the 15cm-long scar that runs down his chest is a permanent reminder of when his heart failed and of the long ordeal that followed.

His nightmare started in 2012, at the age of 22, when he felt terribly unwell one night after enjoying a steamboat dinner with his friends.

His worried parents bundled him into a taxi and took him to the Accident and Emergency Department when he did not stop vomiting and complained of severe stomach pains.

It was not the food poisoning they suspected, but much worse.

Doctors found he had dilated cardiomyopathy, a condition in which the heart becomes enlarged and weak, and his heart was failing.

His doctor, Assistant Professor Tan Teing Ee, head of department of cardiothoracic surgery at the National Heart Centre Singapore, said

the cause could be genetic, from other factors such as a viral infection, or unknown. But most patients are middle-aged or older at the disease's onset.

Mr Wong went through a procedure to be fitted with an electronic device that helps to manage his heart rhythm and prevent sudden cardiac death.

But it did not change anything. He had to be hospitalised repeatedly. During one hospital stay, he lapsed into a coma.

Upon waking about a week later, he discovered that a life-saving device called a Heart Mate 2 had been implanted inside a pocket a surgeon had created in the muscle under his heart. His parents had given their consent while he was unconscious.

The Left Ventricular Assist Device (LVAD) is an artificial pump that takes over the work of the heart, helping to maintain blood circulation.

To power it, he carried a 2kg controller everywhere with him in a sling bag.

He said: "I felt I was a bit *suay* ("unlucky" in Hokkien) as I'm the only person in my family with heart problems. I thought only older people in their 40s and 50s have heart failure. I was so young and I couldn't do sports like young people."

The first year of adapting to life with the LVAD was the hardest.

He had to miss a year of school at Singapore Polytechnic, where he was an electrical and electronic engineering student, and was largely homebound, going out only for medical appointments. His mother,

who is in her 50s, looked after him.

He kept his spirits up for he knew all would be well when he got a heart transplant.

The oldest of three children said his family and friends were supportive and encouraging. His father, who is in his 60s, is a senior production supervisor in a factory and his mother is a service staff member at fast-food chain McDonald's.

But as time passed, it became harder not to despair. While the average wait for a heart transplant is two years, Mr Wong waited four years and two months.

Only about 20 per cent of donor hearts are ultimately suitable for a transplant, said Dr Tan, and the lack of donors leads to a growing wait list for heart transplants.

So far, 82 patients have had heart transplants at the National Heart Centre Singapore – the only medical institution here to perform the procedure. The youngest was a 14-year-old girl.

Mr Wong said he waited so long for a heart that he began to lose hope. And he suffered more setbacks while waiting.

In 2016, he suffered two strokes, the second of which left him with difficulty with writing and language.

Dr Tan said stroke is a leading complication among patients with advanced heart failure who are fitted with the LVAD.

He said Mr Wong had to go through a prolonged period of occupational therapy and extensive speech training but he has made good progress.

Said Dr Tan: "I admire his strength and perseverance to overcome the many difficult and challenging episodes in his life."

Ms Kerk Ka Lee, senior manager at the National Heart Centre's Mechanical Circulatory Support, Heart and Lung Transplant Unit, said that after his second stroke, Mr Wong never gave up, but worked harder

at the exercises prescribed by his speech therapist when others could not understand what he was saying.

Mr Wong made it through this dark time of his life by focusing on goals within his control, such as working hard at rehabilitation and thinking positive.

But more heartache was to come when he could not land a job for about a year after graduation, despite sending multiple resumes.

Some companies told him outright they were afraid he could not cope with the demands of the job.

By a stroke of luck, he was seated next to an employee of Transmedic, which distributes medical equipment such as the Heart Mate 2, during a fund-raising dinner for the National Heart Centre.

From him, Mr Wong learnt of job opportunities at Transmedic. He has been working there as a service engineer for the past four years.

He said: "I felt very relieved to get a job to help contribute to my family income."

Another setback was to come in early 2017, when he learnt that a donor heart had been found, only to be told later that it was unsuitable for transplantation.

In June 2017, he was awoken by a call in the middle of the night and told to go to the heart centre immediately as there was a heart waiting for him. A day later, his new heart was beating in his chest.

"With a new heart, it's like a new lease of life. I can run now and I can play basketball," he said. "I feel like I'm a normal person again and I feel very grateful for a second chance."

But he has not forgotten what it was like to struggle. He is on the executive committee of a support group for patients fitted with the LVAD and often visits patients to encourage them, said Ms Kerk.

For his courage and resilience, Mr Wong was honoured with a Singapore Health Inspirational Patient Award last year, given by the SingHealth Duke-NUS Academic Medical Centre.

Mr Wong said: "I'm a happy-go-lucky person and I try to look on the bright side. I think it's better to think positive."

theresat@sph.com.sg

A second chance at life

SCAN TO WATCH

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Man jailed for assault over apparent staring incident

Shaffiq Alkhatib

A food stall attendant has been jailed for a "barbaric" attack on a man he accused of staring at him.

He stomped on the victim's face, punched him until he fell unconscious and left him in need of facial reconstruction surgery.

Wee Boon How was out on bail for an earlier rioting offence when he attacked Mr Bong Hong Yun, 26, in a fight at Golden Mile Complex that was captured on video and went viral online.

The 24-year-old was jailed for three years and nine months yesterday after pleading guilty to causing grievous hurt to Mr Bong. He also admitted to two rioting charges.

Describing Wee's attack on Mr

Bong as "barbaric", District Judge Marvin Bay noted that the older man had to undergo reconstructive surgery for facial fractures.

The judge added: "There is no place for acts of wanton group violence... in modern day Singapore, and especially for trivial reasons such as from staring or swearing incidents, where in this case the violence was truly grossly disproportionate to any known provocation."

The court heard that Wee was first arrested after he and at least two other men ganged up to attack a 20-year-old man at an Orchard Road nightspot, leaving the victim with cut lips.

Court documents did not reveal the reasons behind the April 2017 incident.

Police later questioned Wee and

he was out on bail when he went to Golden Mile Complex at around 3am on Oct 11 that year.

He confronted Mr Bong on the first storey of the Beach Road shopping complex and accused the older man of staring at him, before a fight broke out between the pair.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Zhou Yihong said: "Some time during the fight... the victim fell onto the ground. The accused did not stop the fight but continuously threw punches at the victim's face until the victim turned unconscious."

"As the victim lay on the ground unconscious, the accused bent down over the victim and continued to throw multiple punches on the victim's face."

After that, Wee stomped on and kicked Mr Bong in the face multiple

times before leaving the scene. The older man was later taken to Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

Wee was charged in court later that month. He was out on bail again when he got involved in a rioting offence, in which he ganged up with four others to assault Mr Benjamin Woon Boon Hock, 32, at a St James Power Station nightspot.

Yesterday, defence lawyer Wee Hong Shern pleaded for his client to be sentenced to 3½ years in jail.

The lawyer said Wee had a low IQ and was exempted from national service, adding that his client was "genuinely remorseful".

For causing grievous hurt, Wee could have been jailed for up to 10 years and fined or caned.

ashaffiq@sph.com.sg



Wee Boon How (left) was jailed for three years and nine months yesterday. He was out on bail for an earlier rioting offence when he attacked Mr Bong Hong Yun in a fight at Golden Mile Complex in October 2017. The fight broke out after Wee accused Mr Bong of staring at him.
ST FILE PHOTO



SINGAPORE BUDGET CONVERSATIONS

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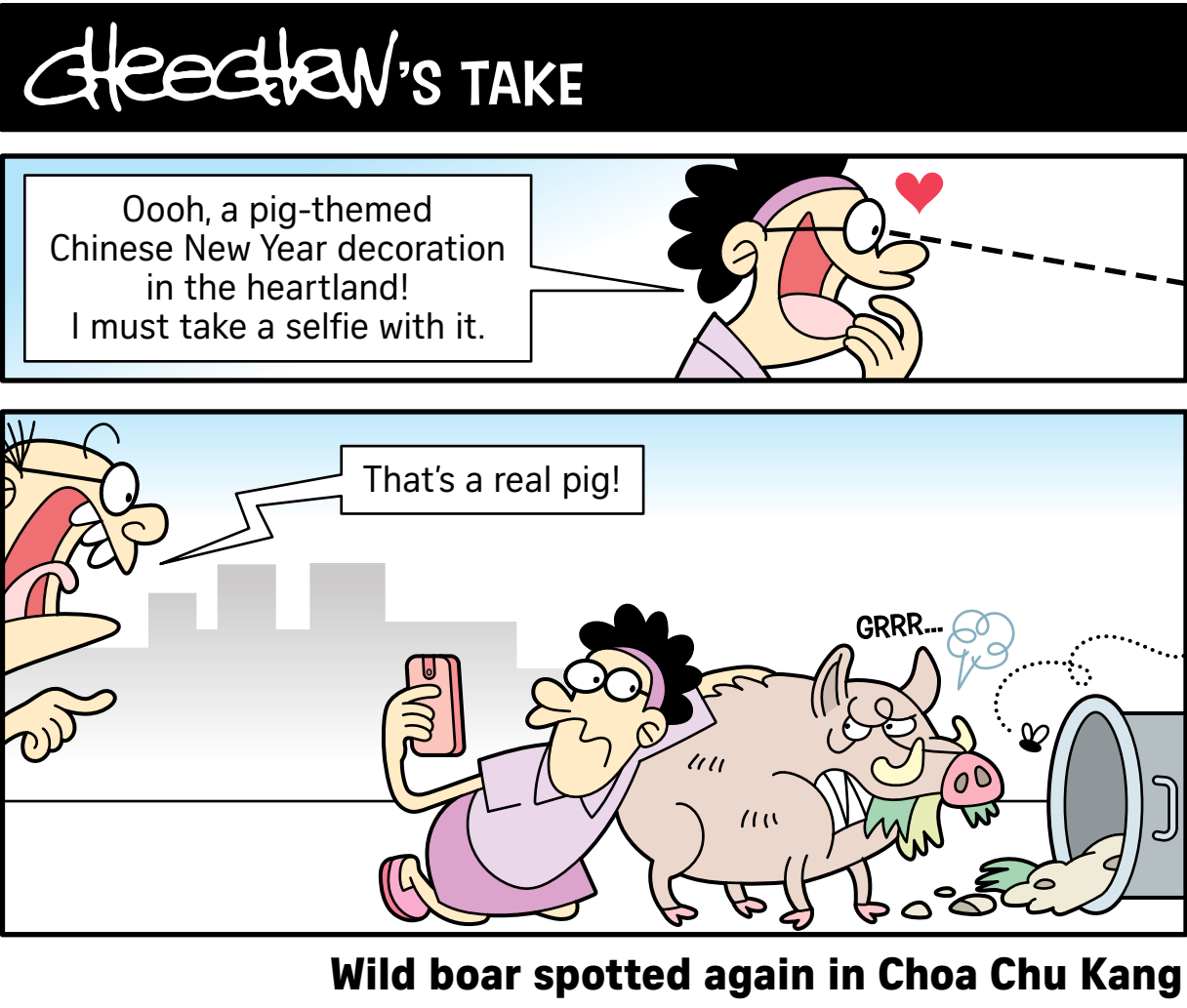
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FORUM



Charge less if customers request reduced portions

I commend the National Environment Agency (NEA) for trying to get Singaporeans to cut down on food wastage (Order only what you can finish, Feb 17).

Unfortunately, NEA did not address the root of the problem. While customers are charged more if they add on to their meals, such as by requesting an extra portion of rice, they still have to pay the original price even if they ask for a reduced food portion.

Customers are not incentivised to request a reduced food portion even if they know they are unable to eat that much. Many Singaporeans have a “kiasu” mentality and think they are losing out if they get less food for the same price.

In fact, at some outlets – especially fast food chains – it is often cheaper to order a set meal containing a main dish, side dish and drink than it is to order those items a la carte.

It is therefore financially prudent for customers to order the full meal, even if that means wasting side dishes that they do not want.

Customers are penalised for the noble intention of having less food to reduce waste under these circumstances.

NEA should educate and encourage businesses to charge customers less if they request less food.

Sean Lim Wei Xin

Let rental fees paid by couples go towards BTO deposit

I was perturbed to learn from couples in their late 20s to 30s that they are postponing marriage until their Build-To-Order (BTO) flats are available, in three to four years.

When asked why they don't just rent a place and get married now, the immediate response was that it costs too much and is money flushed down the drain.

I propose therefore that BTO applicants be allowed to rent suitable flats from the Housing

Board so that marriage and children need not be delayed.

Crucially, the rent that they pay to HDB, minus a reasonable percentage for wear and tear, should be counted towards the deposit on their BTO flat.

Since HDB is the recipient of all these proceeds, this rent can be treated as a kind of “rent credit”.

In the United Kingdom, tenants in social housing are eligible for a huge discount in “right-to-buy”

schemes: Rent paid over three or more years of tenancy is considered a payment towards final purchase.

Given our pro-family approach, I urge the Government to adopt a “right-to-rent” policy for BTO couple applicants who are ready to wed and start a family.

Take it from me, having a first baby when you are nearly 40 is not ideal.

Lee Siew Peng (Dr)

Build community spaces for residents of private estates

I urge the Government to provide community spaces for residents living in private estates (HDB launches first of its new neighbourhood centres, Feb 18).

I live in a private housing enclave in Pasir Ris and my neighbourhood lacks a community focal point for residents from different condominiums to interact with one another.

I have raised this issue with my

MP, asking that a community space with a public playground for children in my neighbourhood be built, but this has yet to materialise.

As was rightly pointed out by Minister for National Development Lawrence Wong, Singaporeans need this “third space” where neighbours gather, socialise and build a sense of community.

Lee Yong Se

FORUM ONLINE

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT: MSF works closely with partners to support vulnerable families.

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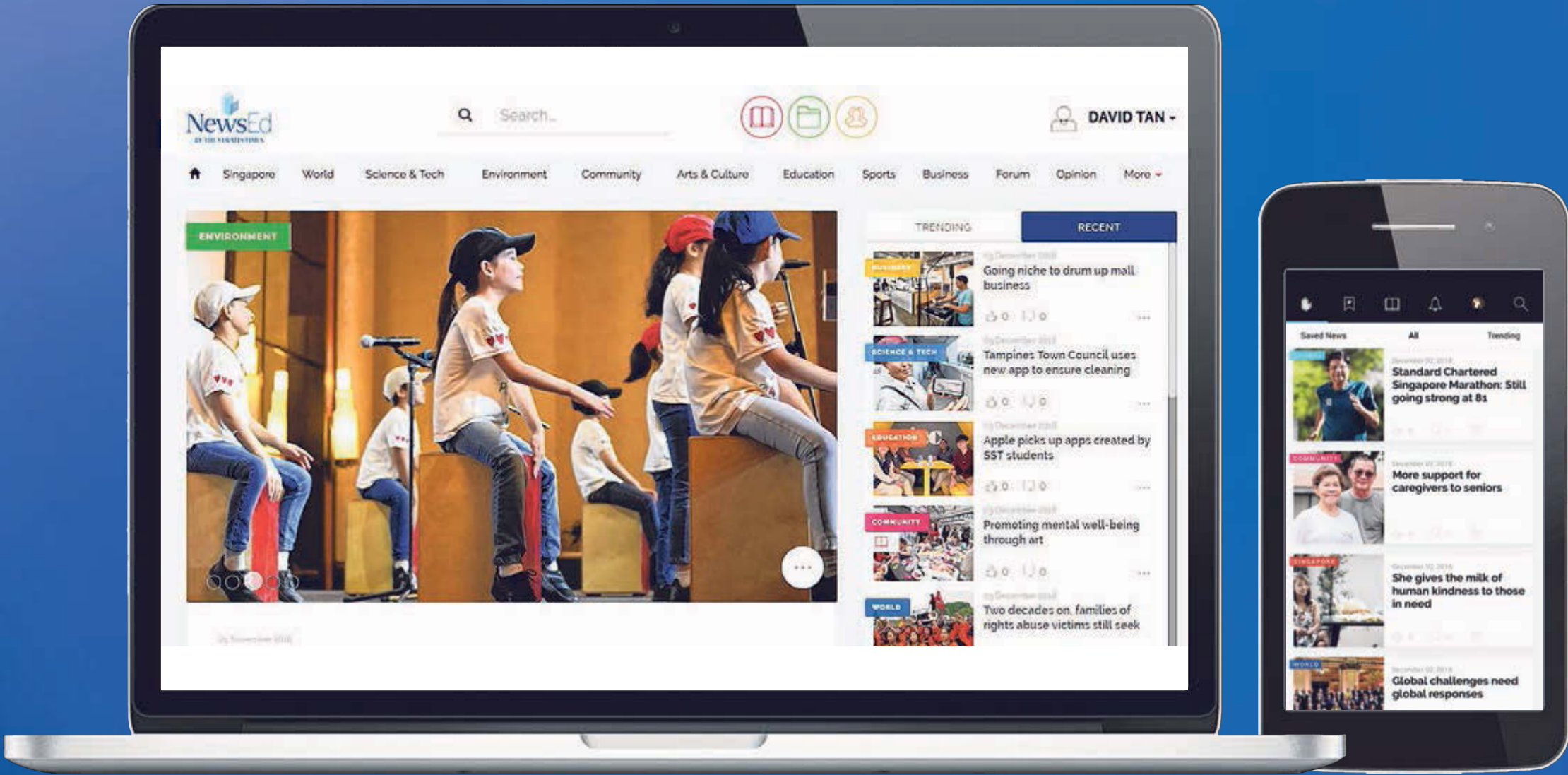
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Teach children sugar content of other foods

While it is important to educate primary school pupils on the impact of unhealthy sugary beverages, a holistic approach to such education is imperative (More primary schools keep out sugary drinks, Feb 18).
Children should also be made aware of the sugar content of other foods when they eat at food outlets, especially at hawkker centres.
Dishes such as black carrot cake, char siew rice and char kway teow contain more sugar than one might think in their sauces and gravies.

I have also observed that young children invariably go for doughnuts and chocolate cakes at confectionery shops, and are enticed by popular high-sugar delicacies such as pineapple tarts, love letters and bak kwa during the Chinese New Year celebrations.
Parents can play a pivotal role in raising their children's awareness of the chronic health issues that can be caused by high sugar consumption.
Above all, parents should set an example for their children by eating right.
Jeffrey Law Lee Beng

Parents can play a pivotal role in raising their children's awareness of the chronic health issues that can be caused by high sugar consumption. Above all, parents should set an example for their children by eating right.

MOE's push needs ground-up support

I congratulate the Ministry of Education (MOE) for its new set of guidelines on how parents and schools can work together for a child's benefit (MOE guide to help parents work better with schools, Feb 17).
It gives both parties a common starting point and also builds mutual respect for each other.
However, I feel that it is also important that MOE reinforce guidelines on current full-time school teachers who are especially active in after-school teaching in commercial schools and private tuition.

This excludes teachers who contribute to self-help and religious organisations.
School teachers must have a healthy work-life balance and should use their time outside school for family and rest.
This is necessary for them to focus on the very demanding work of teaching, motivating their students and other daily administrative duties.
Their salaries are already very competitively pegged with other industries to ensure that they do not burn out.
Having the credentials of being

"National Institute of Education-trained" should certify that they have undergone enough rigour to guide our nation's students, and not be an automatic reason for them to jump into an already stressed-out private tuition market.
Shouldn't current full-time school teachers support the Education Minister in trying to downplay the over-reliance on private tuition?
His leadership has to have the support from the ground up and not just from parents.
Colin Ong Tau Shien

WRITE IN: Letters should be meant for exclusive publication in The Straits Times. They should be no longer than 400 words and must include the writer's full name, address and phone numbers. The Forum editor reserves the right to edit the letters. For women, please indicate Miss, Ms, Mrs or Madam. Please e-mail your letter to stforum@sph.com.sg. Readers can also respond to letters via Facebook and Twitter.

Don't be afraid to say it like it is

I refer to the commentary by editor-at-large Han Fook Kwang (Looking up to leaders to tell the hard truth, Feb 17).
Is this a case of a quick succession of unfortunate incidents that reinforced the notion, rightly or wrongly, that the Government has become lax?
Has the Government become so large that much gets lost in the system, where accountability has dissipated due to safety in numbers?
Or has communication not been

done correctly or in a timely fashion, allowing the groundswell of opinions to fester, especially in the age of social media?
Perhaps public expectations have been markedly raised thanks to economic handouts and the gentler public consultations in recent years. Do we hear only what we want to hear?
But even if the truth is told on sensitive issues, can the public handle it, or will it divide an already stratified society?
We must be careful not to start a

witch-hunt each time something bad happens, lest we discourage talented people from joining the public service and facing scrutiny.
Telling the hard truth can be hard but it must be done to gain trust from the ground.
But the ground cannot be impatient and rush the process in seeking the truth.
Whatever the cause, we must learn from it.
And no government should fear saying it like it is.
Lee Teck Chuan

Provide short-term help when maids go on leave

I appreciate the measures the Government has been putting in place to support people who look after their elderly parents. My sister would be among them.
There is, however, one area that has been overlooked.
Many caregivers of elderly parents

have domestic helpers to help them out when they are at work.
However, they struggle when the maid is on leave.
Not everyone has the ability to provide care on a 24/7 basis.
Can the authorities look into providing short-term help for

families who do not have other forms of support when domestic workers are on home leave?
Otherwise, families are left with no choice but to change domestic workers every two years to avoid a two-week absence.
Huan Ai Min (Madam)

Medals award a move to recognise achievement

We refer to recent articles and letters on the changes to the National School Games Junior Division competition (Trophy for coming in 8th?, Feb 14; and Are schools blunting excellence?, Feb 17).
It is important to remember that these changes only affect nine- to 11-year-old pupils, not the entire student population.
All students learn sports as part of their school's physical education programme, and many participate in inter-class competitions.
Those who are interested and talented in sport also join co-curricular activities (CCAs) and even compete in the National School Games.
Beyond CCAs and competitions, students may also participate in ActiveSG sports

academies and competitions.
For our Primary 3 to 5 pupils, the Junior Division represents their first formal inter-school competition.
Hence, we believe that there is room to provide these younger student-athletes with more developmentally-appropriate competition experiences, increase their playing opportunities and playing time, and encourage the joy of playing sports for life.
One change is the increase in position-based recognition for individual events from the current top four to the top eight positions – but only for events where there are at least 15 participants.
For competitions with fewer than this, the number of medals awarded will be reduced correspondingly.

The rationale for awarding up to eight medals is to create more opportunities for our young student-athletes to be recognised for their achievements.
However, these are not "participation medals".
Pupils must still train hard, compete with a winning mindset and do their best during the competition to win medals.
By implementing these changes in partnership with coaches, parents and sports agencies, our aim is to strike a good balance between the different objectives.
Ultimately, we want our young student-athletes to learn and love sports for life.
Tan Chen Kee (Mrs)
Divisional Director
Student Development Curriculum Division
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A veteran media professional, **Geoffrey Pereira** has taken on various journalistic and media support roles in The Straits Times since 1986. Prior to that, he was a philosophy tutor at the National University of Singapore while working on his postgraduate degree.



A senior journalist at The Straits Times, **Shefali Rekhi** is also an editor at Asia News Network, an alliance of 23 news media. She is one of the key anchors in ST's initiatives to fight fake news.

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ST PHOTO: MAZLAN BADRON

Waiting game

Cabbies waiting for passengers at a taxi stand in the Central Business District on Oct 1, 1982, after the \$1 CBD surcharge – lasting from 4pm to 7pm – was implemented.

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C1 BUSINESS

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HSBC'S PROFIT BEFORE TAX LAST YEAR, WHICH IS BELOW ANALYSTS' EXPECTATION C5



Ms Charlene Leung, a co-founder of Slap dance studio, showing off her pole-dancing skills. She says the studio's choreography incorporates lyrical, ballet and contemporary dance moves, and aims to debunk perceptions that pole-dancing must be sexy or seductive. ST PHOTO: JOSEPH CHUA

FITNESS INDUSTRY SHAPES UP

The fitness industry is expected to gather pace in Asia, including Singapore, as more people step up their pursuit of a healthier lifestyle. And businesses keen for a slice of the pie are going further to differentiate their offerings in an increasingly saturated market, reports Aw Cheng Wei

\$22b

Worth of the fitness industry in the Asia-Pacific, according to a report by Deloitte and the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association last year.

Gyms and fitness studios in Singapore are having a good run, with membership figures up as new year resolutions get couch potatoes onto the treadmills.

There is usually a spike in membership in January, with many people keen to work off the excess weight piled on over the festive season. Numbers normally shoot up about 10 per cent compared with other times of the year, and 2019 is proving to be no exception.

Health and fitness chain UFIT said January memberships are generally 10 per cent higher (compared with other months) for its services such as CrossFit, personal training and sports conditioning.

Operators are expanding outlets and creating or importing new exercise regimes and gym concepts as they bid for a slice of the massive market. The growth here reflects the expansion across the region.

The fitness industry in the Asia-Pacific is worth US\$16.8 billion (\$22.8 billion), according to a report last year by Deloitte and the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association.

The region's health and fitness industry grew by 5.7 per cent a year between 2014 and 2018, according to US-based firm Market Research, and is expected to hit 6.4 per cent annually between 2018 and 2023.

For instance, local outfit Gymmboxx, which opened in 2010, now has six outlets – all operating 24/7.

Health and fitness chain UFIT has 17,000 members, a sharp jump from the 1,000 in 2011.

Pole dance studio Slap has 1,500 members, a steep rise from the 400 it started out with in 2014.

WeBarre, which has four outlets, said its classes were “oversubscribed” for the first eight months when it opened in 2016. Membership figures usually spike between November and March, said co-founder Anabel Chew.

Singapore Polytechnic marketing and retail lecturer Lucas Tok said fit-

ness outlets are making a comeback since popular gym chain California Fitness shut its doors here in 2016, a sudden move that left around 27,000 members in the lurch.

That abrupt closure hurt consumer confidence but the rising popularity of athleisure wear and boutique gyms has given the fitness industry a new lease of life, according to Mr Tok.

Fitness firms told The Straits Times they have introduced new regimes and gym concepts to stay fighting fit amid the competition.

Owners who previously invested in failed fitness companies said they have learnt from their mistakes, such as employee management, and applied the lessons to their new ventures.

NEW, IMPROVED CONCEPTS

Boutique studios and gyms are offering a slew of fitness regimes.

Neue Fit studio in Kallang has a class called MuayHIIT, which combines Muay Thai techniques with high-intensity interval training, for beginners to get a good workout and learn martial arts.

The studio's co-founder Grace Huang noted that beginners may be discouraged from pursuing Muay Thai as they consider it a competitive sport.

“People were saying they would join me (for Muay Thai classes) after they get fit. But the classes are supposed to make them fit,” said Ms Huang, who used to run a chain of martial arts schools before she started Neue Fit last January.

Starting with MuayHIIT allows beginners to try out Muay Thai “without having to punch or touch people”, she added. The studio offers various types of exercises, from yoga to Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

Ms Huang's business partner, Ms Lam Shumei, said the diversity of classes is important so that Neue Fit is known not just for one type of sport, which may be fad-driven.

Some prospective members may



Neue Fit owners Grace Huang (left) and Lam Shumei offer MuayHIIT, an exercise combining Muay Thai with high-intensity interval training. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO



UFIT chief operations officer Dean Ahmad (left) and CEO Will Skinner say clients and trainers meet frequently to train together. ST PHOTO: JONATHAN CHOO

not want to “sign up for one gym and one discipline” only, she added.

Ms Charlene Leung, a co-founder of Slap dance studio, said it has its own choreography, called pole lyrical, with influences from lyrical,

ballet and contemporary dance.

It is an elegant type of pole dance that aims to debunk perceptions that pole-dancing must be sexy or seductive, and it is the most popular class at the studio, she said.

“We want to present pole-dancing as an athletic and graceful performance,” she added.

She and her two co-partners started the Asia Pole Championship in 2015 to promote pole as an athletic sport. The annual competition attracts participants globally, including from China, Japan and the United States.

The Global Association of International Sports Federation granted the International Pole Sports Federation observer status in 2017 – the first step towards joining the Olympics. The championship and official recognition give members confidence as well as something to train for, said Ms Leung.

Another company, Breathe Pilates, installed gyrotic equipment and collaborated with Yoga Lab to create BarreLab last year to diversify its offerings, said co-owner Dennis Teo.

He said: “As a business, we do understand that most people get bored with doing the same exercises over and over again, and it has been a challenge to keep clients.”

BUILDING GOOD RELATIONSHIPS

Happy and competent staff members who understand how to work with people are the lifeblood of fitness companies, said business owners.

Gymmboxx chief executive and co-founder Umar Faruq said: “If employees are happy, they are more likely to provide good service and take care of customers.”

He said he does not hire sales consultants, so “nobody tries to outsell each other” – a move designed to foster a harmonious workplace.

He added: “We focus on a culture that is conducive for everybody. All our gyms have rules, like no slamming and no grunting, so no one feels intimidated.”

UFIT chief operations officer Dean Ahmad said trainers and clients meet frequently to train together, and that helps to “make the (UFIT) brand more relatable” as well as foster a community spirit.

They also spend time together in social settings, and when “you have a lot of coaches spending time with clients outside the workplace, that is a very good time for feedback”.

It started CrossFit classes in 2014, near The Grandstand in Bukit Timah, and opened a second CrossFit outfit in Tanjong Pagar in 2015.

CrossFit is a combination of high-intensity weightlifting and gymnastics. Classes are usually conducted in groups.

CEO Will Skinner said building relationships is one way to provide the “very best service and value” to clients.

He added that employees are also given opportunities to develop professionally, and this has helped attract and retain staff in a tight labour market.

Neue Fit's Ms Huang said that employee management is particularly important when staff members come from diverse cultures.

She learnt the lesson the hard way when she started a martial arts school in 2013. Ms Huang, who used to work freelance in the advertising industry, had no experience running a business then.

The school quickly expanded to three outlets, but downsized to one after Ms Huang left in 2017.

She said: “I almost went mad managing instructors who were from countries such as Brazil, South Korea and Thailand, with their cultural differences. I had to learn along the way.”

Keeping time was a sticky point.

“Some cultures are more particular about keeping time, others less so, and that created a lot of friction,” Ms Huang said. Starting classes on time and late-comers became a problem. “We had to explain to the employees how Singapore works.”

Even as gyms and fitness outlets learn to manage their teething problems and sort out their growth strategies, larger forces at play may force them or others to rethink their plans.

Singapore Polytechnic's Mr Tok warned that the burgeoning market may become saturated, though the retail scene has benefited overall from the resurgence of gyms and fitness studios.

“Everyone wants a piece of the pie,” he said. “Landlords may increase rents, forcing the gyms to increase membership prices. This may have a negative effect in the long run.”

awcw@sph.com.sg

Property sector needs to focus on long term: Heng

Minister notes industry has had bitter medicine but says progress is made by being resolute



From left: Mrs Cheong-Chua Koon Hean, deputy secretary (special duties) Ministry of National Development; Redas' immediate past president Augustine Tan; Mr Kwek Leng Beng, Redas' honorary patron; Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat; Redas' president Chia Ngiang Hong; and Mr Quek See Tiat, president of the Council for Estate Agencies, tossing yu sheng at yesterday's spring festival lunch. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

Grace Leong
Business Correspondent

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat has seen financial meltdowns in his time, so his warning that “when you have a period of euphoria, you end up with a very hard landing that you can call a crisis” carried some weight yesterday.

Mr Heng said at the Real Estate Developers' Association of Singapore (Redas) spring festival lunch that the 2008 global financial crisis illustrated just “how interlinked economies and financial systems are, and that we will have to be very watchful of this global development and these interlinkages”.

“The development of markets in Singapore, whether it is the stock markets or property markets, is closely tied to developments in the region, particularly in Asia and the world,” he added.

“We have not been able to prevent economic cycles in the world. But I hope that we can do our best to prevent economic crises.”

Mr Heng, fresh from his Budget speech on Monday, noted that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's characterisation of the Merdeka Generation as one that “faced the problems resolutely, worked with the Government, and when necessary, accepted the bitter medicine that made us strong again” applied also to the real estate sector.

“From time to time, there has been bitter medicine, but we face the problem resolutely because we work together and we can really continue the progress,” he added.

“Redas has played a very important role in our nation-building journey. In fact, many of you here are responsible for making Singapore what it is today.”

His remarks came after Redas president Chia Ngiang Hong called for a review of a condition in the additional buyer's stamp duty (ABSD) policy, which requires developers

to complete developing a new project and to sell all its units within five years, in exchange for upfront remission of ABSD payable when they buy residential land.

“Excessive land banking should be discouraged, but some flexibility in terms of time frame to sell out projects” could help, Mr Chia said.

The land ABSD stands at 30 per cent and limits the time frame for all residential sites, regardless of size, to be sold within five years, Mr Chia said yesterday. This policy has pushed all developers to exhaust their inventory at around the same time, and could partly account for the land price escalation in 2017 and 2018 because everyone was replenishing land banks at the same time, he added.

Mr Chia warned that the policy could lead to “a repeat of the 2017-2018 ‘land grab’ situation in four to five years’ time”.

Mr Heng pointed out that the need to focus on the long term is going to be greater for the property sector, adding that “the Concept Plan set a very important way to develop our little red dot”.

“I have been very surprised how, in many of my overseas trips, whenever I meet property developers and planners and architects, the one thing that they mention is how Singapore has been able to maximise this limited space to achieve maximum impact... Necessity is the mother of invention, and if we can turn this necessity into an invention, our developers will have a role everywhere in the world,” he said.

Mr Heng also challenged the real estate industry: “The question is what are the most significant innovation in real estate that we can think of, where can we push the frontiers of real estate because it's no longer just about physical space, it's about what we use that space for and how we can maximise value in that space.”

gleong@sp.com.sg

Midas shareholders told investigation needs more time

An investigation into possible irregularities at Midas Holdings requires more time, given the complexities of dealing with different jurisdictions, the investor watchdogs said yesterday.

The Securities Investors Association (Singapore), or Sias, gave the guidance after meeting officers from the Commercial Affairs Department (CAD) and Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) last week.

This was to relay the concerns of Midas shareholders anxious about the outcome of police reports lodged with the CAD that centred on possible breaches of securities laws and other offences arising from Midas operations in China.

The company is a key manufacturer of aluminium-based products for the rail transport sector around the region, particularly in China.

Sias also said the authorities have noted that the alleged irregular transactions at Midas occurred in a foreign jurisdiction, which adds complexity to the evidence gathering process and the time required for investigations.

The watchdog has urged shareholders to be patient and to allow due process to take place.

“At the same time, Sias calls on

the board and management of Midas to offer all necessary assistance to facilitate the investigation process and communicate with their shareholders and stakeholders on updates periodically,” it said in a statement.

The investigation was triggered in March last year when the Midas audit committee, comprising three independent non-executive directors, lodged a report with the CAD, although the full extent of the possible breaches was yet to be determined.

The MAS and CAD jointly investigate offences under the Securities and Futures Act and the Financial Advisers Act.

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A pair of adjoining three-storey conservation commercial shophouses, at 44 and 46 Club Street, are on the market. They have a combined land area of 2,387 sq ft and floor area of 6,208 sq ft. PHOTO: CUSHMAN & WAKEFIELD

Club Street conservation shophouses up for sale

A pair of adjoining three-storey conservation commercial shophouses in Club Street are up for sale.

The 999-year units near Chinatown have a combined land area of 2,387 sq ft and floor area of 6,208 sq ft.

Foreigners can buy the properties, which do not attract additional buyer's stamp duty.

Mr Shaun Poh, Cushman & Wakefield's executive director of capital markets, said the shophouses, which will be sold with existing tenancy, were “an exceptional investment opportunity”.

“More than 1,000 new hotel rooms are expected to be added in the locale, injecting vibrancy and increasing tourism footfall, with the ongoing construction of new hotels in the vicinity, namely The Clan and Capri by Fraser, coupled with the recent sale of the hotel site at Club Street,” he added.

The real estate firm said conservation commercial properties in prime central locations “remain highly sought after by investors”, such as boutique funds, family offices and wealthy individuals.

“We expect keen interest from end-users who are looking to locate their business in a building with naming rights within the central business district,” it added.

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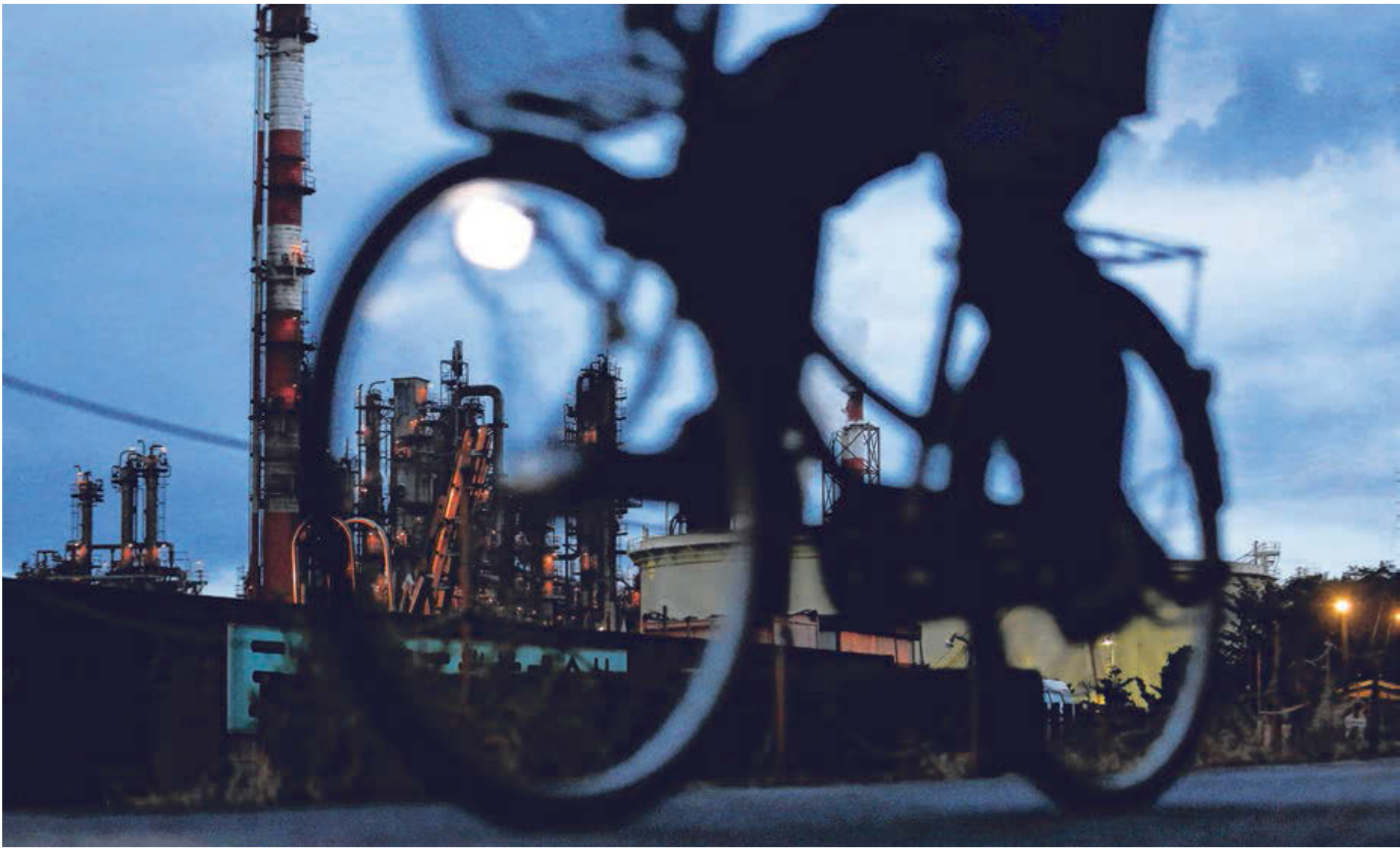
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An industrial zone in Japan. Sentiment among both manufacturers and non-manufacturers is expected to slip further over the coming three months, boding ill for the central bank's key tankan survey due next in April. PHOTO: REUTERS



Japanese businesses feel the blues as growth slows

Poll shows sentiment worsening, with no sign of pick-up as US-China trade woes linger

TOKYO • Japanese business sentiment worsened this month to levels last seen in late 2016, the Reuters tankan poll showed, in a sign that companies took a hit from weakening demand both at home and abroad in the face of slowing global growth and trade friction.

The monthly poll, which tracks the Bank of Japan's (BOJ) closely watched quarterly tankan survey, found manufacturers' mood sliding for a fourth straight month and service-sector morale falling for the first time in four months.

The worsening business sentiment underscores the risks that Japan's economy – the world's third-largest – faces this year, including an intensifying US-China trade war and a planned nationwide sales tax hike in October.

Sentiment among both manufacturers and non-manufacturers is expected to slip further over the coming three months, boding ill for the central bank's key tankan survey due next in April.

“Capital expenditure is being put off due to the US-China trade war and slowdown in Chinese economy,” a manager of a machinery maker wrote in the survey.

Managers of 266 firms responded on condition of anonymity in the Reuters poll of 480 large and mid-size companies, conducted from Feb 1 to 14.

“Business conditions are not so good because of slumping private consumption at home and a slowdown in the Chinese economy,” a manager of a textile maker wrote.

The sentiment index for manufacturers fell to 13 this month from 18 seen in January, dragged down by electrical machinery makers and industrial materials producers, including oil refinery, steel and chemicals, the Reuters tankan showed.

The latest index marked the weak-

est reading since October 2016, and is expected to fall further to 12 in May.

The service-sector index plunged to 22 this month from 31 in January, weighed down by retailers, a worrying sign for consumption, which makes up about 60 per cent of the economy. The index is seen falling further to 20 in May.

Fragile consumer spending could be a source of concern for policymakers who are taking steps to en-

sure the twice-delayed sales tax hike to 10 per cent from the current 8 per cent will go ahead in October, as the 2014 tax hike hit consumers hard.

Japan's economy rebounded in the fourth quarter as business and consumer spending pulled back from the slump caused by various natural disasters, although analysts expect trade friction and a planned sales tax hike to dampen growth this year.

The BOJ's last tankan, in December, showed the business mood held steady from three months ago, but companies saw conditions worsening ahead as the US-Sino trade war and slowdown in China – Japan's largest trading partner – hurt corporate activity.

The Reuters tankan indexes are calculated by subtracting the percentage of pessimistic respondents from optimistic ones. A negative figure means pessimists outnumber optimists. REUTERS

The sentiment index for manufacturers fell to 13 this month from 18 seen in January, dragged down by electrical machinery makers and industrial materials producers, including oil refinery, steel and chemicals, the Reuters tankan showed.

A PAIR OF 3-STOREY COMMERCIAL SHOPHOUSES ALONG CLUB STREET

- Zoned "Commercial" within the historic "Chinatown-Telok Ayer Conservation Area" in the Central Business District
- 999-year leasehold w.e.f. 01/10/1827
- Total Land Area: 221.8 sq m (approximately 2,387 sq ft)
- Total Floor Area: approximately 6,200 sq ft
- Near Chinatown, Telok Ayer and the upcoming Maxwell MRT stations
- Approved for food & beverage use on the ground floor
- Growth precinct with upcoming new hotels within close proximity
- Foreigners eligible to purchase / No ABSD payable

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(TUESDAY) 3.00PM

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NOTICE TO SECURITYHOLDERS OF HYFLUX LTD S\$500MILLION 6% PERPETUAL CAPITAL SECURITIES ("THE PERPETUAL SECURITIES")

Hyflux Ltd has proposed a draft Scheme of Arrangement. The Court will on 21 February 2019, 2:30 pm, hear its application to convene a meeting of creditors and, if approved, the scheme is likely to be presented to the Perpetual Securities holders (and other stakeholders) for voting, at a Scheme Meeting on **5 April 2019 or on such other date as may be subsequently announced**. Under the Scheme of Arrangement, holders of the Perpetual Securities ("Securityholders") are required to file their Proofs of Claim ("Proofs"), to set out the claims they have against Hyflux Ltd, by **5.00 pm, 1 March 2019**. Hyflux has also announced that it will admit claims of Securityholders based on the records of the Central Depository Pte Ltd where Securityholders do not, or incorrectly file, Proofs. For more information, please visit <https://www.perpetual.com.sg/our-services/update-on-hyflux-limited>

20 February 2019

PERPETUAL (ASIA) LIMITED
(Company Registration Number 200518022M)

THE MONETARY AUTHORITY OF SINGAPORE

Auction of Singapore Government Securities (SGS)

Individual investors! may submit auction applications for the following 30-year SGS bond. This is a re-opening of an existing bond.

Issue details	Return	Key dates
• Issue code: NA16100H • New issue/re-opening: Re-opening • Remaining tenor: Approximately 30 years • Original tenor: 30 years • Issuance amount: S\$1.6 billion • Coupon rate: 2.75% • Coupon payment dates: 1 Mar and 1 Sep	The effective rate of return if the bond is held to maturity, will be the cut-off yield determined at the auction. As this is a re-opened bond, the cut-off yield may not be the same as the coupon rate . As an illustration, the bond is currently yielding about 2.58% per year , based on end-of-day prices as at 18 February 2019.	• Auction date: 26 February 2019, 12pm • Application deadline: Typically 1-2 business days before auction date • Issuance date: 1 March 2019 • Maturity date: 1 March 2046

How to apply
Cash applications can be made through **DBS/POSB, OCBC and UOB ATMs and internet banking portals, and OCBC's mobile application**. You will need an **individual CDP account number**.

Applications using Supplementary Retirement Scheme (SRS) funds can be made via the **internet banking** portal of your SRS Operator (DBS/POSB, OCBC and UOB).

Applications using CPF funds must be submitted in person at your respective CPF Investment Scheme (CPFIS) agent bank:

- DBS: 12 Marina Boulevard Level 3 or call 1800-111-1111
- OCBC: 65 Chulia Street or call 1800-363-3333
- UOB: 80 Raffles Place or call 1800-222-2121

SGS auctions
All SGS bonds are auctioned using a **uniform price auction**. This means that all successful applicants will receive the bond at the same yield, which is the highest accepted yield (cut-off yield) of successful bids.

Applicants can choose to submit a **competitive or non-competitive bid**. If you wish to invest in the bond regardless of the return, a non-competitive bid should be submitted.

If you wish to invest in the bond only if it yields above a certain level, you may submit a competitive bid, specifying the yield that you are willing to accept. Do note that you may not get the full amount that you applied for, depending on how your bid compares to the cut-off yield.

Successful applicants will see the bonds reflected in their individual CDP accounts. Unsuccessful applicants will see the money refunded into their bank accounts.

Footnotes
¹This document is intended for individual investors. It is for informational purposes only and does not constitute the terms of issue for this SGS bond. For the complete terms of issue, please refer to the public notice dated 19 February 2019 at : <http://www.sgs.gov.sg/News/Bond-Announcements.aspx>. Institutional and corporate investors are advised to refer to the above-mentioned public notice.
²If MAS' electronic payment system is not operating on issuance, coupon payment or maturity date(s), then issuance, coupon payment or redemption, as the case may be, will occur on the next day when the electronic payment system is in operation.

A note on re-opened bonds
Re-opened bonds have the same maturity date and coupon rate as the original bond. However, depending on the result of the auction, it may be issued at a different price (i.e. not the face value of \$100). As such, the effective rate of return if the bond is held to maturity may not be the same as the coupon rate.

For example, as NA16100H has a coupon of 2.75% and tenor of about 30 years, its price would vary, depending on the auction cut-off yield as set out below:

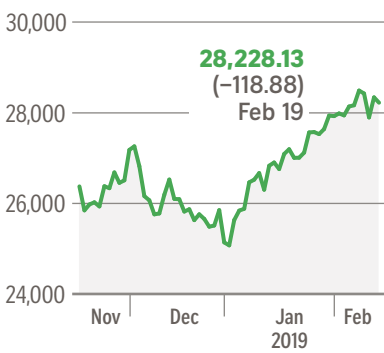
Coupon	Cut-off yield (Effective rate of return)	Price (As at 18 Feb)
2.75%	2.58%	103.34
2.75%	2.68%	101.34
2.75%	2.78%	99.43

Because the price of the bond will only be known after the auction, 115% of the amount you applied for will be deducted from your bank account upon application. After the auction, any excess (shortfall) will be refunded to (deducted from) your account.

Risks
Investments in SGS bonds are exposed to the risk of price changes. You may receive more or less than your principal if you sell your SGS bond before its maturity date. **If you want the flexibility to get your principal back in any given month, you may wish to consider Singapore Savings Bonds** (<http://www.sgs.gov.sg/savingsbonds>) instead.

For more information, visit <http://www.sgs.gov.sg> or call 6221 3682.

Hang Seng



Shanghai Comp



Nikkei 225



Dow Jones



BullsAndBears

STI closes lower in lacklustre trading

Monday's Budget could give boost to healthcare stocks later, analysts say

Navin Sregantan

You could just about hear a pin drop in yesterday's muted market trading as investors kept their heads down and wallets closed.

There was some profit-taking but not much to focus on, given American bourses were closed for a public holiday overnight.

The Straits Times Index (STI) managed to stay above water for most of the day but eventually ended 6.17 points or 0.2 per cent lower at 3,259.80, with 1.12 billion shares worth \$775.94 million changing hands. This was below the Singapore Exchange's daily average volume. Losers outnumbered gainers 218 to 172.

CMC Market's Margaret Yang said the low volume "suggests investors are not eager to jump into the market at the current level, due to mixed earnings and a tepid economic outlook".

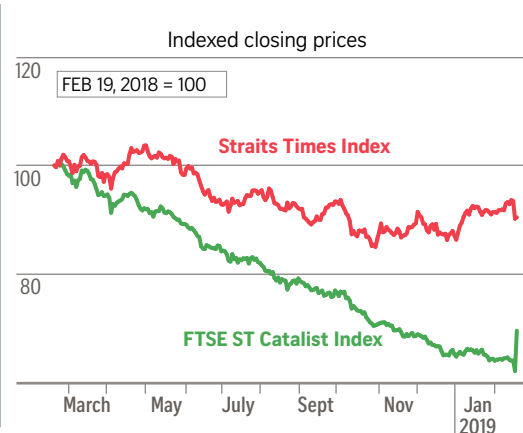
Pennies saw heavy trading, with marine firm Ezion Holdings the most active. It lost 2.3 per cent to close at 4.2 cents on trade of 40.1 million shares.

Genting Singapore lost 0.9 per cent to \$1.09, with 26.9 million shares changing hands, making it the STI's most active.

Ms Yang attributed the STI's dip mainly to profit-taking. ThaiBev

Straits Times Index

Feb 19, 2019
3,259.80 ↓
-6.17 (-0.19%)
Current streak
1 day
Day high
3,280.04
Day low
3,258.71
52-week high
3,615.28 (May 2, 2018)
52-week low
2,966.45 (Oct 30, 2018)

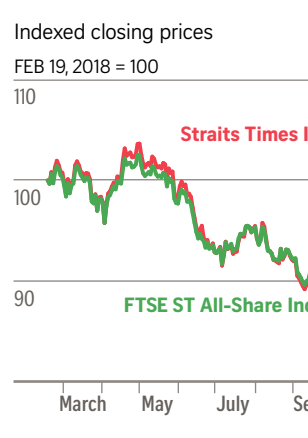


FTSE ST Catalyst Index

Feb 19, 2019
300.41 ↑
+0.14 (+0.05%)
Current streak
1 day
Day high
302.00
Day low
298.54
52-week high
469.26 (Feb 21, 2018)
52-week low
300.24 (Feb 1, 2019)

FTSE ST All-Share Index

Feb 19, 2019
789.47 ↓
-1.44 (-0.18%)
Current streak
1 day
Day high
793.51
Day low
789.41
52-week high
868.02 (April 30, 2018)
52-week low
722.91 (Oct 30, 2018)



was down 3 per cent to 79.5 cents; Singapore Airlines lost 1.2 per cent to \$9.83; Jardine C&C retreated 1.3 per cent to \$36.26; and HPH Trust declined 4.4 per cent to 32.5 cents.

Among financials, DBS Bank, which released full-year results on Monday, fell 0.4 per cent to \$25.10.

Analysts said healthcare stocks could be among the winners from Monday's Budget, but not so much in the short term.

Raffles Medical rose 0.9 per cent to \$1.12, Thomson Medical dipped 1.3 per cent to 7.9 cents, and OUE Lippo Healthcare put on 6.3 per

cent to close at 6.7 cents.

Elsewhere in Asia, profit-taking meant markets ebbed and flowed, with Australia, Japan, China and Malaysia posting modest gains. South Korea and Hong Kong closed with mild losses.

Although it was a quiet day, upcoming events this week suggest things might heat up.

CapitalLand and Sembcorp Marine announce results today, Genting Singapore is set to report tomorrow, with OCBC Bank and United Overseas Bank on Friday.

IG market strategist Pan Jingyi also pointed to today's release of the minutes of the US Federal Reserve meeting, and US-China trade negotiations towards the end of the week. While the US and China have shown more patience with one another, "some of the difficult issues are expected back on the discussion table", she added.

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Goldman's Asia-Pacific CEO said to be retiring after 30 years at bank



Mr Ken Hitchner joined Goldman in 1991 and has been head of various departments.

HONG KONG • Mr Ken Hitchner, Goldman Sachs Group's chairman and chief executive officer for the Asia-Pacific region outside Japan, is retiring after almost three decades with the firm, people with knowledge of the matter said.

Mr Hitchner will continue in his Hong Kong-based role until the middle of the year, said one of the people, who asked not to be identified. He moved to Asia almost six years ago and was promoted to his current position in September 2017.

A representative for Goldman declined to comment.

A former US navy pilot, Mr Hitchner joined Goldman in 1991 and has served as its global head of the healthcare banking group and global co-head of technology, media and telecom.

He has advised clients including Johnson & Johnson on its US\$19.7 billion (S\$27 billion) takeover of Synthes in 2012. He was named managing director in 2000 and partner in 2002.

Mr Hitchner's departure will leave Mr Todd Leland and Mr James Paradise, the co-presidents for Asia outside Japan, as Goldman's most senior executives in the region.

BLOOMBERG

Straits Times Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY LAST TRADED SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV
279	245	Ascendas Reit	278	+1	9862	5.8	1.4
192	161	CapitaCom Trust	188	unch	5714	4.6	1
380	298	Capitaland	339	+5	8880	3.5	0.8
243	196	CapitalMall Trust	241	+1	4850	4.8	1.2
1359	780	CityDev	945	-4	1540	1.9	0.8
251	196	ComfortDelGro	243 cd	+2	6420	4.3	0.8
3128	2265	DBS Grp	2510 cd	-10	3293	4.8	1.4
994	767	DairyFarm USD	US897	unch	102	2.3	-
133	85.5	Genting Sing	109	-1	26877	3.2	1.7
37	22.5	Golden Agri-Res	25.5	unch	11490	3.2	0.6
37	22.5	HPH Trust USD	US24 cd	-15	12169	1.1	0.4
744	588	HongkongLand USD	US709	+4	1405	2.8	0.3
7120	1099	JMH USD	US7104	+74	125	2.3	0.8
4078	3155	JSH USD	US3967	+47	194	0.8	0.5
3828	2766	Jardine C&C	3626	-47	373	3.2	1.8
835	567	Keppel Corp	612 cd	-2	1434	4.9	1
1404	1036	OCBC Bank	1164	-7	3138	3.2	1.2
564	455	SATS	510	unch	3729	3.5	3.5
786	672	SGX	777	-2	1504	3.9	9.7
1184	914	SIA	983	-12	805	4.1	0.9
292	231	SPH	247	-4	2857	5.3	1.1
378	321	ST Engineering	373	-1	2264	4	5.5
341	243	Sembcorp Ind	257	unch	1488	5.2	0.9
358	283	Singtel	300	unch	10824	6.8	1.7
88	57.5	ThaiBev	79.5	-2.5	15056	0.8	3.9
3037	2380	UOB	2580	-7	1250	3.9	1.2
898	591	UOL	669	+4	749	2.6	0.6
2965	1320	Venture Corp	1611	-10	749	3.7	2.1
338	297	Wilmar Intl	337	+1	5369	3	1
154	84	YZJ Shipbldg SGD	139	-1	15940	3.2	1

FTSE ST Large & Mid-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY LAST TRADED SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV
279	245	Ascendas Reit	278	+1	9862	5.8	1.4
120	105	Ascott Reit	113	-1	1703	6.3	1
74.5	59	Bumitama Agri	68.5	+0.5	114	1.1	16
178	143	CDL HTrust	157	-1	1343	-	1
192	161	CapitaCom Trust	188	unch	5714	4.6	1
380	298	Capitaland	339	+5	8880	3.5	0.8
243	196	CapitalMall Trust	241	+1	4850	4.8	1.2
164	122	CapitaStar China Tr	144	unch	820	7.1	0.9
1359	780	CityDev	945	-4	1540	1.9	0.8
251	196	ComfortDelGro	243 cd	+2	6420	4.3	0.8
3128	2265	DBS Grp	2510 cd	-10	3293	4.8	1.4
994	767	DairyFarm USD	US897	unch	102	2.3	-
73.5	59	Far East HTrust	65.5 cd	unch	1184	-	0.7
183	150	First Resources	172	+3	329	4	2.2
231	212	Fraser's Cpt Tr	230	+2	2157	5.2	110.6
114	101	Fraser's L&I Tr	112	+1	14234	6.1	12
133	85.5	Genting Sing	109	-1	26877	3.2	1.7
37	22.5	Golden Agri-Res	25.5	unch	11490	3.2	0.6
224	167	GuocoLand Ltd	185	+1	40	3.8	0.6
37	23	HPH Trust USD	US24 cd	-15	12169	1.1	0.4
744	588	HongkongLand USD	US709	+4	1405	2.8	0.3
7120	1099	JMH USD	US7104	+74	125	2.3	0.8
4078	3155	JSH USD	US3967	+47	194	0.8	0.5
3828	2766	Jardine C&C	3626	-47	373	3.2	1.8
58	44.5	Kepp Infra Tr	50	-0.5	4557	7.4	1.8
835	567	Keppel Corp	612 cd	-2	1434	4.9	1
124	108	Keppel Reit	123	-1	5908	4.5	0.9
151	125	Man Oriental USD	205 cd	unch	266	5.5	3.6
273	170	Man Oriental USD	US208	+1	90	1.4	1.5
186	152	Mapletree Com Tr	178	unch	3408	5.1	1.2
206	184	Mapletree Ind Tr	199 cd	unch	3905	5.9	1.3
140	118	Mapletree Log Tr	136	-3	14036	5.6	1.2
128	107	Mapletree NAC Tr	124	-1	5883	6	0.9
83	73	NetLink NBN Tr	80	unch	8347	-	1
1404	1036	OCBC Bank	1164	-7	3138	3.2	1.2
199	136	OUE	157	+1	78	1.9	0.4
87	64.5	OUE HTTrust	71.5	unch	644	-	1
250	157	Olam Intl	193	-1	1029	3.9	1
59	28	Oxley	33	+1	5762	4.5	0.9
290	256	ParkwayLife Reit	279	-1	341	4.6	1.5
121	98	Raffles Medical	112	+1	835	2	2.6
564	455	SATS	510	unch	3729	3.5	3.5
786	672	SGX	777	-2	1504	3.9	9.7
1184	914	SIA	983	-12	805	4.1	0.9
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292	231	SPH	247	-4	2857	5.3	1.1
103	98	SPHREIT	102	unch	197	5.4	1.1
378	321	ST Engineering	373	-1	2264	4	5.5
341	243	Sembcorp Ind	257	unch	1488	5.2	0.9
269	149	Sembcorp Marine	158	-1	6563	1.3	1.4
58	39	Silverlake Axis	53.5 cd	-15	1661	5.6	7.8
144	88.5	SingPost	97.5	unch	2029	3.6	1.3
358	283	Singtel	300	unch	10824	6.8	1.7
262	158	StarHub	164	+3	5433	9.8	5.1
73.5	63.5	StarhillGbl Reit	70	+1	2291	6.5	0.8
199	163	Suntree Reit	191	unch	5506	5.2	0.9
88	57.5	ThaiBev	79.5	-2.5	15056	0.8	3.9
10.2	3.7	Thomson Medical	7.9	-0.1	18618	-	2.9
3037	2380	UOB	2580	-7	1250	3.9	1.2
898	591	UOL	669	+4	749	2.6	0.6
2965	1320	Venture Corp	1611	-10	749	3.7	2.1
338	297	Wilmar Intl	337	+1	5369	3	1
226	183	Wing Tai	204	unch	336	3.9	0.5
154	84	YZJ Shipbldg SGD	139	-1	15940	3.2	1
182	116	Yanlord Land	139	-1	1249	4.9	0.5

FTSE ST Small-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	LAST SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV
145	129	AIMSAMP Cap Reit	138	unch	417	7.5	1
68.5	48	Accordia Golf Tr	57	+0.5	234	6.8	0.6
86.5	74	Ascendas-hTrust	85.5	+0.5	1267	-	0.9
119	99	Ascendas-iTrust	112	-1	3494	5.4	1.3
58	12.2	Asian Pay TV Tr	13.4	+0.2	3761	48.5	0.2
64	48	Banyan Tree	59	unch	194	1.7	0.8
333	115	Best World	271	halt	-	1.5	9.7
85.5	76	Boustead	81	+1	477	3.7	1.2
126	79.5	BreadTalk	88	unch	101	8	2.3
632	521	Bukit Sembawang	569	+4	34	3.2	1.1
87	65.5	Cache Log Trust	71.5	unch	837	8.3	1.1
52	39.5	Centurion	40.5	unch	24	6.2	0.7
166	104	China Aviation	125	-1	421	3.6	1
46	29.5	China Everbright	34	unch	629	14	0.7
165	90.5	China Sunshine	128	-1	605	2.3	1.4
103	64	Chip Eng Seng	69.5	-0.5	941	5.8	0.6
53.5	31.5	Cosco	35	-0.5	4838	-	1.5
700	302	Delong	573	+19	10	-	0.6
27.5	17.5	Duty Free Intl	19.5	unch	220	9.5	1.2
77	67.5	EC World Reit	74.5	unch	382	8.1	0.9
59	47	ESR-REIT	53	-0.5	1122	7.3	1.1
140	92	First Reit	105	unch	459	8.2	1
152	135	Fraser's Com Tr	148	-1	1243	6.5	0.9
80	66.5	Fraser's HTrust	73	unch	119	-	1
25.5	16.4	Geo Energy Res	18.6	-0.5	972	5.4	1.1
91	70.5	HRnetGroup	78.5	-0.5	259	2.9	2.4
67.5	52	Health Mgt Intl	56 cd	-1	60	0.6	5.3
279	73	Hi-P Intl	98.5	-0.5	3382	25.4	1.5
283	252	Hong Leong Fin	270	unch	87	4.8	0.7
80.5	71	IREIT Global	76.5	+0.5	236	7.8	1.1
37	18.3	Indofood Agri	21.5	unch	478	-	0.3
84	43	Japfa	81	+15	3153	0.6	1.5
76.5	49	KSH	52.5	+1.5	1	4.2	0.9
85	53	Kep-KBS Reit USD	65.5	-0.5	506	9.5	0.6
149	128	Keppel DC Reit	146	+1	3043	5	1.4
190	132	Keppel T&T	188	-1	11	-	1.2
119	7	KrisEnergy	7.7	-0.3	9987	-	0.9
70	44.5	Lian Beng	49	-0.5	166	4.6	0.4
40.5	18	Lippo Malls Tr	24	+0.5	2159	14.3	0.9
53	27	MM2 Asia	27	-2	2450	-	1.5
95	69.5	ManulifeReit USD	84 xd	unch	687	6.6	0.7
120	95	Metro	100	+1	118	5	0.6
20	5	Noble	8.1	susp	-	-	-
63.4	45	OUE Com Reit	49.5	-0.5	590	7	0.7
65	54	PEC	57	+0.5	679	3.5	0.6
39.5	17	POSH	18.3	unch	4	-	0.5
64.5	44.5	Q&M Dental	47	unch	82	3.4	3.4
110	55.5	QAF Ltd	69	-2	143	7.2	0.8
124	96	Riverstone	113	unch	40	2	3.7
54.5	22	SIIC Environment	35.5	-1	248	-	0.6
45	38.5	Sabana Reit	42.5	unch	939	7.5	0.7
119	91.5	Sheng Siong	108	unch	1056	3.1	6
25.5	3.3	Sino Grandness	5.9	-0.1	1801	-	0.1
69	56	SoilbuildBizReit	60	-0.5	660	8.8	1
129	80.5	Tianjin ZX USD	90.5	-0.5	227	-	0.7
46	32.5	Tuan Sing	38.5 cd	+0.5	324	2.3	0.4
136	54	UMS	67	+1	2064	7.5	1.6
112	58.5	Valuetronics	68	-1	2898	6.7	1.5
15	8.3	Ying Li Intl	12.2	+0.1	2971	-	0.3
48.5	24	Yoma Strategic	33.5	unch	1955	0.7	0.9
33	16.1	Yongnam	17.3	+0.1	249	-	0.3

HSBC has reported a profit before tax of US\$19.9 billion (S\$27 billion) for last year, up 16 per cent from the year before, but below analysts' expectation of US\$22 billion. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG



Higher costs, stock rout hit HSBC profit growth

It warns weak economic outlook for China, Britain will be a hurdle

HONG KONG • HSBC Holdings has posted disappointing profit growth as higher costs and a stock rout took a toll on business, while cautioning that a weaker economic outlook for China and Britain would throw up further hurdles this year.

The bank remains alert to the downside risks of the current economic environment, global trade tensions and the future path of interest rates, chief executive John Flint said yesterday, rounding off his first year at the helm of the firm.

Hong Kong shares of HSBC fell as much as 2.7 per cent after the earnings announcement.

An economic slowdown in China, exacerbated by its trade war with the United States, poses a challenge to HSBC's strategy of pouring more resources into Asia, where it already makes more than three-quarters of its profits.

Europe's biggest bank by market value is also being buffeted by headwinds from Britain, which grew at its slowest in half a year in the three months to last November as factories suffered from tough global trade conditions and the approach of Brexit.

HSBC reported a profit before tax of US\$19.9 billion (S\$27 billion) for last year, up 16 per cent from US\$17.2 billion the year before, but below an average estimate of US\$22 billion, according to Refinitiv data based on forecasts from 17 analysts.

It said it would pay a full-year dividend of US\$0.51 per share, roughly in line with analysts' expectations.

The bank also said it is confident that it can maintain the dividend at this level.

However, it failed to achieve "positive jaws" last year, a key metric watched by investors which tracks whether the bank is growing revenues faster than costs, for which it blamed the negative market environment in the fourth quarter.

HSBC plans to achieve "positive adjusted jaws" this year.

"Despite more challenging market conditions at the end of the year and a weaker global economic outlook, we are committed to the targets we announced in June," Mr Flint said in a statement.

The CEO had said last June that

HSBC would invest US\$15 billion to US\$17 billion in three years in areas including technology and China, while keeping profitability and dividend targets little changed.

Yesterday, Mr Flint said: "We will be proactive in managing costs and investment to meet the risks to revenue growth where necessary, but we will not take short-term decisions that harm the long-term interests of the business."

China's economic growth slowed to 6.6 per cent last year, the weakest in 28 years, weighed down by rising borrowing costs and a clampdown on riskier lending that starved smaller, private companies of capital and stifled investment.

HSBC's core capital ratio, a key measure of financial strength, fell to 14 per cent at end-December from 14.5 per cent at end-2017, due mainly to adverse foreign exchange movements.

Its Asia profits grew 16 per cent to US\$17.8 billion, accounting for 89 per cent of the group profit.

Since taking over from Mr Stuart Gulliver last February, Mr Flint has stuck largely to the same China-focused strategy as his predecessor while attempting to revive HSBC's ailing US franchise and putting less emphasis on its investment bank.

REUTERS

Company Briefs

Natural Cool Holdings

Air-conditioning company Natural Cool Holdings is moving into the food and beverage business through a deal to acquire two snack manufacturing businesses for \$980,000 in cash via a new subsidiary, the company announced yesterday before the market opened.

Natural Cool has put up \$80,000 for an 80 per cent share in newly incorporated SFB Holdings. The remaining 20 per cent of SFB Holdings is held by Mr Leong Yew Meng, who also controls privately held Yummy YM and SFB Global. Yummy YM makes and sells cooked-food snacks such as pumpkin cakes and traditional Chinese dumplings, while SFB Global makes and sells soft drinks, bread, cakes, confectionery, mineral water and soya bean beverages.

SFB Holdings will acquire the businesses and relevant assets of Yummy and SFB Global from both companies for \$980,000 in cash. Natural Cool, but not Mr Leong, will provide SFB Holdings with a shareholders' loan to finance the acquisition and provide working capital to SFB Holdings.

Mr Leong is an independent third party and, upon completion of the transaction, will be in the key management team of SFB Holdings and assist in the running of the business, Natural Cool said.

The purchase price reflects the earnings potential of the acquired businesses as well as the value of the assets, which have been independently assessed to be worth \$762,200, the company said.

Boustead Projects

Real estate solutions company Boustead Projects yesterday said its wholly owned subsidiary Boustead Projects E&C has won a contract worth over \$70 million to design and build an integrated advanced high-tech manufacturing facility in Singapore.

The facility will have a gross floor area of approximately 36,300 sq m and is expected to be completed by the second quarter of next year. It will expand the client's existing operations in Singapore.

The contract brings the group's order book backlog to approximately \$741 million. The backlog comprises unrecognised project revenue remaining at the end of December last year plus the total value of new orders secured since then.

Mr Thomas Chu, managing director of Boustead Projects, said the latest contract award consolidates the company's competitive edge as a local leading progressive builder for high-end, Industry 4.0-ready industrial facilities. It also extends its track record in the technology industry to over 440,000 sq m.

Procurri loses another potential buyer as US investor drops out

An investment firm has withdrawn its acquisition offer for technology supplier Procurri Corporation, it was announced yesterday.

No specific reasons were provided for the withdrawal by New State Capital Partners from the deal, which was first announced on Feb 3.

New State is a private American firm that invests in business, healthcare and industrial services.

It had earlier proposed to acquire all the shares of Procurri, other than treasury shares and those held by substantial investor Irrucorp, via a scheme of arrangement.

Irrucorp owned 12.03 per cent of Procurri as at March 16, 2018, according to Procurri's 2017 annual report.

Procurri chairman and chief executive Sean Murphy, and execu-

tive director and global president Edward Flachbarth are both deemed to have interests in Irrucorp.

New State's withdrawal follows the termination of further discussions with another interested but unnamed buyer.

The move comes after Procurri's major shareholder, DeClout, said last month that it would further pare its stake in the mainboard-listed firm.

DeClout intends to sell 36.3 million Procurri shares to a fund held by a private equity firm at 33 cents apiece to raise net proceeds of \$12 million.

Procurri, whose operations include supplying data centre equipment, said yesterday that the deal between DeClout and the private

equity firm would be done via a put and call option agreement. The options are due to be exercised between March 18 and April 17.

DeClout now owns less than 30 per cent of Procurri, having cut its stake from 46.8 per cent when it sold 48 million shares – or 17.2 per cent – in January at 32 cents each.

Two independent third parties bought the shares.

The first buyer, a Soh Chooi Lai, acquired \$11.8 million worth of stock on Jan 4, amounting to 13.5 per cent of Procurri.

The other buyer is unnamed. Only investors holding more than 5 per cent of a firm must declare their stake in a regulatory filing.

Procurri shares slumped after the news yesterday, and closed down 9.7 per cent at 28 cents.



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Interbank currency rates

Currencies	Against US\$ Bid	Against US\$ Offer	Against US\$ Bid Feb 19	Against US\$ Offer Feb 19
S\$/US\$ to one unit of foreign currency:				
Australian dollar	0.9658	0.9661	0.715	0.716
Canadian dollar	10236	10239	0.7541	0.7541
Euro	15329	15338	1.1293	1.1297
NZ dollar	0.9262	0.9269	0.6823	0.6827
Sterling pound	1.7524	1.7531	1.2910	1.2912
US dollar	1.3574	1.3577	-	-
S\$/US\$ to 100 units of foreign currency:				
Chinese renminbi	20.0402	20.0484	14.7636	14.7665
Danish kroner	20.5449	20.5525	15.1355	15.1378
Hong Kong dollar	1729	1730	12.7408	12.7410
Indian Rupee	190	190	1.3975	1.3981
Indonesian rupiah	0.0096	0.0096	0.0071	0.0071
Japanese yen	12262	12268	0.9033	0.9036
Korean won	0.1202	0.1205	0.0886	0.0887
Malaysian ringgit	33.20	33.24	24.4559	24.4798
New Taiwan dollar	4.4000	4.4024	3.2415	3.2425
Norwegian krone	15.7407	15.7515	11.5962	11.6016
Philippine peso	2.5979	2.5995	1.9139	1.9146
Saudi riyal	36.1925	36.2034	26.6631	26.6652
Swedish krona	14.6105	14.6184	10.7636	10.7670
Swiss franc	135.0109	135.0676	99.4629	99.4827
Thai Baht	4.3451	4.3488	3.2010	3.2031

MSCI INDICES

Feb 18	In local curr %dy	%yr
World Preliminary	1586.6	0.2 10.1
EAFE Preliminary	1092.3	0.5 8.4
Europe Preliminary	1529.0	0.1 8.9
Australia	1220.1	0.4 6.9
Austria Preliminary	550.4	0.0 10.5
Belgium Preliminary	1026.2	0.6 12.2
Canada Preliminary	2024.3	0.0 10.6
Denmark Preliminary	8157.4	0.4 10.1
Finland Preliminary	731.0	0.3 11.9
France Preliminary	1867.0	0.3 9.0
Germany Preliminary	902.2	0.1 6.9
Greece Preliminary	47.3	1.4 9.0
India	1231.5	-0.8 -2.5
Indonesia	7300.3	2.3 3.2
Ireland Preliminary	196.9	0.2 9.9
Israel Preliminary	255.8	0.0 10.9
Italy Preliminary	687.8	0.6 10.6
Japan	957.8	1.5 7.2
Korea	662.6	0.6 9.7
Malaysia	587.1	0.2 0.9
Netherlands Preliminary	1642.7	0.2 12.7
New Zealand	140.8	0.2 6.1
Norway Preliminary	2979.3	0.0 7.0
Pakistan	403.5	-0.3 13.1
Philippines	1342.2	-0.1 6.3
Portugal Preliminary	87.3	0.0 8.1
Singapore	1693.0	1.0 6.2
Singapore Free	364.0	1.0 6.2

Government securities

Period	Issue code	Coupon rate (%)	Maturity	Close Bid	High	Day's Low
2-Year	NY05100N	3.250%	01-Sep-20	101.94	0.00	0.00
5-Year	NS19100A	2.000%	01-Feb-24	100.06	100.10	100.03
10-Year	NX18100A	2.625%	01-May-28	104.02	0.00	0.00
15-Year	NZ13100V	3.375%	01-Sep-33	112.22	0.00	0.00
20-Year	NZ16100X	2.250%	01-Aug-36	97.45	0.00	0.00
30-Year	NA16100H	2.750%	01-Mar-46	103.16	103.40	103.40

Note: Based on latest issue

Source: Monetary Authority of Singapore

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"I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith. And now there is waiting for me the victory prize of being put right with God, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give me on that Day..." 2 Timothy 4:7-8



Maria Mun Swee Heong

Age: 108

Returned to the Lord on 18th February 2019.
Leaving behind children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, relatives, friends and caregivers.

Wake is held at Church of St Teresa, Chapel of Repose,
510 Kampong Bahru Road, Singapore 099446
from Wednesday 20th February 2019, 5.00pm.

Nightly prayers will be held at 8.00pm.

Funeral Mass on Saturday 23rd February 2019 at 3.00pm
at Church of St Teresa, thereafter cortege leaves
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 2 for cremation at 5.15pm.

With Deepest Sympathy &
Heartfelt Condolences to our
Managing Director Mr Roger Ho Kai Keng
Operations Director Mr KS Ho
On the demise of their beloved father



Mr Ho Foo Sian

Departed on 19 February 2019

From:
Management and Staff of



Acepac International (S) Pte Ltd
Shanghai Acepac Trading Pte Ltd



Nagammal

Age: 87

Passed away peacefully on 19 February 2019, dearly missed and remembered by loved ones.

Husband: Lakshmanan (deceased)

Children & Spouses: Jeganathan (deceased) & Prema

Tamilarasi & Kandasamy

Visalatchy & Kandasamy (deceased)

Thilakarsi & Vasu

Tamilsilvan & Eileen Koh

Ellil Mathivan & Ching Kim Hwa

Jyoti & Karupiah

Grandchildren: Chakravarthi & Sailaja

Malarvizhi & Saravanan

Thenmozhi & Senthilkumar

Kumaresan & Kavitha

Shanmuga & Kavitha

Kavitha & Balaji

Durga & Anand

Moushmi & Manish

Kokila & Narendran

Achutha

Vaseegharan

Dhiren

In-laws, great-grandchildren, all relatives and friends.

Mom is resting at Direct Funeral

Services Memorial Hall,

Block 89 Geylang Bahru,

#01-2734, Singapore 339697.

(5 Minutes from Geylang Bahru

MRT Station)

Cortege leaves on Wednesday

20 February 2019 at 4.00pm

for Mandai Crematorium Hall 4

for cremation at 5.00pm.



Om Narayana



Narayani Rajagopal

Age: 86

Passed away peacefully on 19 February 2019.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Husband: K. Ramadas (deceased)

Daughter of Rajagopal Naidu (deceased)

and Narasimma (deceased)

Daughters:

Sukuna (Ragi)

Sundari

Gangha

Seetha

Sisters:

Athileetchumi

Rukumani (deceased)

Thanaletchumi

Sons:

Haridass

Thulasidass

Murali (deceased)

Grandchildren & Grandson-in-law:

Shoba & Mahesh, Jesudas, Gayathri, Prasad,

Sumitha, Arvin, Shalini, Vinod and Nisha

Great-Granddaughters:

Elizabeth and Eisabella

Sons-in-law:

Soundhraj

Vijayan

Poonia Murthy

Rajasegar

Brother-in-law:

Kalidas

Daughters-in-law:

Lee Gek

Vani

And all relatives and friends.

Amma and Grandma is resting

at Block 215 Tampines Street 23 #02-57,

Singapore 520215. Tel: 9029 0491 / 6785 2930

Cortege leaves on Thursday 21 February 2019 at 4.00pm

for Mandai Crematorium Hall 1 for cremation at 5.00pm.

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return again.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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SPORT

SPURS DATE FOR S'PORE

EPL club pledge to 'engage fans' when they visit the Republic as part of Asia tour in July

David Lee

A Hurri-Kane will hit Singapore shores in July as English Premier League club Tottenham Hotspur announced yesterday that their first team, headlined by England captain Harry Kane, will visit the Republic as part of their pre-season tour.

While the 25-year-old striker is currently nursing an ankle injury, he could return at the end of this month to boost third-placed Spurs' title hopes. They are five points behind Manchester City and Liverpool.

Besides Kane, other Spurs stars expected to feature prominently

are France's World Cup-winning skipper and goalkeeper Hugo Lloris, England midfielder Dele Alli and South Korean sensation Son Heung-min.

Tottenham said in a statement yesterday: "We are delighted to announce that the first-team squad will travel to Singapore and Shanghai as part of our pre-season tour in July in preparation for the 2019-20 season.

"The tour will also enable us to join in the Centennial celebrations of our Global Principal Partner, AIA, whose roots trace back to Shanghai in 1919.

"The visit also affords the club the opportunity to engage with our millions of fans across Asia including

Official Supporters Clubs in both countries in which we will be playing fixtures."

Spurs are set to be among the four teams - one more than the last two years - who are pencilled in for the International Champions Cup (ICC) at the National Stadium in July.

Premier League giants Manchester United are also all but confirmed for the tournament, while negotiations are ongoing to add Italy's Juventus and Inter Milan to the line-up.

The ICC is set to be held over the July 19-21 weekend, with just two games instead of the previous three.

Although the fixtures will be confirmed only on March 27, the weekend scheduling should attract more fans to the National Stadium.

Spurs last visited Singapore in 1995 when they lost 4-2 on penal-



Tottenham players like Christian Eriksen, Harry Kane, Danny Rose and Son Heung-min are expected to be in Singapore as part of their pre-season tour in July. The London side last visited the Republic in 1995. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ties to the Lions after a 1-1 draw.

Tours to Asia are not new to the London side as they were also in Beijing for the 2009 Premier League Asia Trophy and Hong Kong for the 2013 edition. They also played in Malaysia in 2015 and Hong Kong in 2017.

Die-hard Spurs fan Fabius Chen, a 33-year-old public servant, said: "I was there as a kid in 1995 and it was

the first time I watched them in person. My favourite player at the time was Darren Anderton and I have never forgotten Singapore goalkeeper David Lee saving his spot-kick in the shoot-out.

"I'll be there again in July because as a fan from Singapore, chances to see the team live are few and far between.

"I hope manager Mauricio Pochet-

tino and defender Toby Alderweireld will still be at the club then.

"I'm also looking forward to seeing a few new faces who can hopefully take the team further next season, a couple of future stars like striker Troy Parrott, and definitely a better result than the last time they were here."

davidlee@sph.com.sg

SPL IN NUMBERS

65

Number of footballers (excluding the Young Lions) younger than 23 last year, nearly double the 33 in 2017 before age regulations were imposed.

126

All SPL games will be streamed live this year, compared to 98 last season.

19.4

Average passing mark of the Yo-Yo test this year. The passing mark was raised from 18.4 to 19.1 this year. The test is a multi-stage shuttle run conducted to increase tempo to gauge players' anaerobic fitness and all players must pass before being registered. No player failed last year.



Tampines Rovers' Zulfadmi Suzliman getting in a cross past Home United's Shakir Hamzah, now with Kedah, during last season's Singapore Premier League match at Our Tampines Hub. ST FILE PHOTO

Facilities at shared league stadiums will be upgraded

Wang Meng Meng

As the local football campaign gets under way this weekend with the Community Shield, the Football Association of Singapore (FAS) announced yesterday some new initiatives for the second season of the Singapore Premier League (SPL).

Apart from a slight increase in subsidies for the local clubs, the biggest change will be the stadium sharing plan.

From this year, four stadiums - Jalan Besar (Young Lions and Hougang United), Bishan (Home United and Balestier Khalsa), Jurong East (Albirex Niigata and War-

riors FC) and Our Tampines Hub (Tampines Rovers and Geylang International), will be used to host the eight local clubs. DPMM FC will continue to play their home matches in Brunei.

This has led to concerns that fans of the affected clubs will feel displaced. For example, Hougang are known for their loyal fan base and this is acknowledged by FAS general secretary Yazeen Buhari, who said: "They are ever-present at Hougang Stadium and they have a certain connection with the place.

"But we have explained to them the investment... is to increase the match-day experience.

"Given the infrastructure that ex-

ists in Hougang Stadium, it is less attractive to upgrade Hougang as compared to doing it (sharing stadium) at Jalan Besar."

Gerard Christopher, the FAS' deputy director (general secretary's office), added: "While the clubs, like Hougang, play their home matches at a new stadium, it does not mean they will be uprooted in terms of community engagement. They still continue to reach out to the community there and engage with schools."

Infrastructure at the four SPL stadiums will be upgraded.

Although the costs were not disclosed, the shared stadiums will receive bigger LED scoreboards, bet-

ter sound systems, bucket seats for all spectators, LED billboards and banners as well as renovated dressing rooms in club colours.

"It is a great venue, and it will give us opportunities to organise match-day activities, and promote the club on other days, because there are just so many people using the facility," Geylang's general manager Andrew Ang told The Straits Times earlier, when asked about playing their home games at Our Tampines Hub.

The FAS was keen to emphasise that the stadium sharing arrangement is not permanent.

As part of the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth's Sports Facilities Master Plan, residents in

Punggol can also look forward to a regional sports centre, similar to Our Tampines Hub. It is expected to be ready by 2021 and a northern-based club like Hougang could relocate to the new stadium.

The local SPL clubs, which received \$1.01 million each in subsidies from the FAS last season, will enjoy an increase in funding this year.

Although no figures were disclosed, Yazeen said: "There's a slight increase this year that is proportionate to the fact that clubs can sign an extra foreign player."

For the new season, clubs will be allowed to increase their squad size from 25 to 28, with the additional three players not restricted by age.

Last year, the local clubs were limited to two foreign signings, but are now allowed to sign an additional foreigner under the age of 21.

Tampines Rovers chairman Desmond Ong welcomed the changes, and said: "Any additional subsidy is greatly welcomed given the fact that the clubs run on tight budgets.

"But it remains to be seen how the clubs playing in AFC (Asian Football Confederation) competitions will perform if they abide by the SPL rules and take to the field with three local Under-23 players and one foreign Under-21 player."

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THE STRAITS TIMES YOUNG ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

PRESENTED BY 100PLUS



Determination key to success

Passion also helps footballer Putri and the ACS paddlers balance school and sports

Xener Gill

Talent without passion and determination often leads nowhere.

It was 12 days before Putri Nur Syaliza's 15th birthday when she became the youngest footballer to play and score for the women's national team last March.

The forward also emerged top scorer in the Schools National girls' B Division championship last April.

But it was not an entirely smooth time for the 15-year-old, who had training six times a week.

"At some point, I felt like dropping everything because I was so tired. I just felt like giving up," said the Queensway Secondary School Secondary 4 student, who is one of five nominees in the running for The Straits Times Young Athlete of the Year award.

"I had to force myself to concentrate in school and not fall asleep during lessons."

She soldiered on thanks to the strong support from both her family, who encouraged her to keep going, and her school, which helped her juggle her busy sports and academic schedules.

Her success as a footballer has come as a surprise to her.

"I'm a girl and, in football, for a girl to be successful is not very conventional," said Putri, who dreams of playing for an overseas club one day.

Determination and passion are traits she shares with Ryan Chong and his Anglo-Chinese School (Barker Road) teammates.

Table tennis was not an official co-curricular activity (CCA) when they entered the school last year.

GENDER BARRIER

I'm a girl and, in football, for a girl to be successful is not very conventional.



PUTRI NUR SYALIZA, surprised by her encouraging achievements in football.

But the boys had been training together since they were in Primary 3. Two weeks before the South Zone C Division competition, they put together a team of eight, just one more than the minimum number required to participate, and finished third.

They faced many challenges such as having to juggle their school work, table tennis training and other CCAs that they had signed up for.

"We worked very hard. We were very serious during training and went for practice competitions so that we could improve," said 13-year-old team captain Ryan.

The team's pioneering members – Ryan Chong, Silas Chua, Ethan Ong, Ryan Eng, Benjamin Wee, Ethan Chua, Ryan Tan and Seth Wong – are now part of a 21-member CCA with 12 school team players and nine recreational players.

Their medal and the impact it left on their school has also earned them a nomination for the Young Athlete of the Year award.

The three other nominees are high jumper Kampton Kam, hockey player Sean See and floorball player John Alicante Embile.

The award, which is an extension of the ST Athlete of the Year award, will be given out tomorrow.

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Above: The ACS (Barker Road) C Division table tennis squad of (front row, from left) Ryan Chong, Silas Chua, Ethan Ong, Ryan Eng, Benjamin Wee, (back row, from left) Ethan Chua, Ryan Tan and Seth Wong.



Left: Queensway Secondary School student Putri Nur Syaliza dreams of playing for an overseas club one day.
ST FILE PHOTOS

John Alicante Embile
Floorball

Sean See
Hockey

Putri Nur Syaliza
Football

OUT DO YOUR SELF

Winners never say never.
Even as the youngest one around.
You strive harder, go beyond yesterday's limits,
push on for your team.
Only when you look back, you see how
far you've come.

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SportsWorld

Expelled from Italy's Serie C after 20-0 loss

MILAN • An Italian third division football club that cobbled together a seven-man team and lost 20-0 on Sunday has been thrown out of the league. Pro Piacenza's first team squad and coaching staff refused to travel for the game at Cuneo owing to unpaid wages, leaving the financially troubled team to start with six teenagers and a 39-year-old physiotherapist – the only players they could find. After ruling on Monday that some of the players were not registered for the match, Lega Serie C's disciplinary committee disqualified the team from the competition and handed Cuneo a 3-0 walkover win. REUTERS

Spanish Super Cup to feature four teams

MADRID • The Spanish Super Cup is to undergo a radical transformation under which it will expand to four teams, with two semi-finals and a final all to be played outside Spain, Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) president Luis Rubiales said yesterday. Rubiales, who became RFEF president last May, also broke with tradition last year by turning the traditional curtain-raiser between the LaLiga champions and the Copa del Rey winners from a two-legged tie into a single game played in Tangier, Morocco, where Barcelona beat Sevilla 2-1. REUTERS

Fourth Laureus gong for Novak Djokovic

MONACO • Novak Djokovic's stupendous comeback from injury last year, which saw him win two Grand Slam titles, earned him the Laureus Sportsman of the Year Award on Monday. The Serbian tennis star – who added the Australian Open in January to the Wimbledon and US Open crowns he won in 2018 after coming back from elbow surgery – won the award for a fourth time. American gymnast Simone Biles was named Sportswoman of the Year for a second time, on the back of the 21-year-old's historic achievement last year in adding a fourth all-around world title to her collection. AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

Kvitova bounces back but Bertens exits

DUBAI • Petra Kvitova recovered from losing a first-set tiebreak to defeat Katerina Siniakova and progress to the third round of tennis' Dubai Championships yesterday. The second seed saw off her 44th-ranked Czech compatriot 6-7 (3-7), 6-4, 6-4 in over 2½ hours at the Aviation Club. The 2011 and 2014 Wimbledon champion said she was unfazed about the early start. Slovak Victoria Kuzmova accounted for Dutch seventh seed Kiki Bertens, winning 6-2, 4-6, 7-6 (8-6). AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

'NEW ERA' IF CITY CONQUER EUROPE

Gundogan says Champions League title can cement club among continent's aristocrats

LONDON • For all of Manchester City's quality, midfielder Ilkay Gundogan has said that his team can be considered as one of Europe's elite clubs only if they lift the elusive Champions League trophy. City have won the Premier League three times since the Abu Dhabi United Group bought them in 2008, but have never gone past the semi-final stage of Europe's premier club competition. "If you want to be in the international elite... you need to clinch this trophy," Gundogan told uefa.com ahead of today's last-16, first-leg clash at Schalke. "I think that, if we were to win it some day, the club would enter a new era, the same level as Real (Madrid), Barcelona, Bayern (Munich) or Juventus, clubs that are maybe a step above us." City were defeated in the last 16 three times in the previous five seasons while their only semi-final appearance came in 2016 when they were knocked out by Real 1-0 on aggregate. "We've experienced a lot in the Champions League in recent years,

not all of it positive, of course. We should've won it at least once," Gundogan added. "The biggest low was probably being knocked out by Liverpool (in the quarter-finals) last season. "For that reason, the motivation to go far in this competition is huge and I think we have the quality required." As their Premier League title rivals Liverpool sunned themselves in Marbella last week, City were getting muddy in beating Newport 4-1 in the FA Cup last Saturday to stay on course for a historic clean sweep of four trophies. City, top of the Premier League on goal difference, should cruise past a Schalke side languishing in 14th place in the German Bundesliga. After the Schalke clash, City will bid to lift their first silverware of the season when they take on Chelsea in the League Cup final on Sunday. "It's better to be in this situation," insisted manager Pep Guardiola at going for four trophies rather than concentrating playing resources towards Champions League and Pre-

mier League success. "It's important in February to be here, in four competitions. Now we go to the biggest stage, the Champions League, and we will see (what happens) in May and June." Rather than fearing the fatigue from fighting on four fronts, Guardiola is embracing the challenge and at least has the luxury of strength in depth to call on. Leroy Sane, Phil Foden and Riyad Mahrez all scored against Newport to make their case for a Champions League start in Gelsenkirchen. Meanwhile, Massimiliano Allegri's Juventus open their own last-16 tie at Atletico Madrid today as they continue their push for the European title which has eluded them for over two decades. "We have to score at least one goal in Madrid, our qualification depends on this," warned the Italian. "The two teams are evenly balanced." AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

Schalke v Man City
Singtel TV Ch110 & StarHub Ch214, tomorrow, 3.55am



Midfielder Ander Herrera heading past Chelsea goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga to score Manchester United's opening goal in their 2-0 FA Cup fifth-round win at Stamford Bridge on Monday. It was a rematch of last season's final which Chelsea won 1-0. PHOTO: AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

Stubborn Sarri unruffled as Blues flop again

LONDON • Maurizio Sarri insists he is not worried about being sacked as Chelsea manager despite his side's lacklustre 2-0 FA Cup fifth-round loss to Manchester United at Stamford Bridge on Monday. He endured chants of "You don't know what you're doing" and "You're getting sacked in the morning", as Chelsea fans showed their frustration at the club's fifth defeat in their last 10 games. Two first-half goals from Ander Herrera and Paul Pogba sealed victory for United as the Cup holders failed to muster a shot on target after the 11th minute, despite having 67 per cent of possession in total. Asked if he was worried about his job, Sarri said: "It's not my problem.

"I was only worried about my position when I was in League 2 in Italy, not now. I am worried about the results, not about the fans. "I can understand our fans, because the result wasn't really good. We are out of the FA Cup." It was the Italian's refusal to change his tactics, even to countenance a Plan B, that angered the Chelsea faithful. Plan A certainly did not work. His substitutions were like for like, William for Pedro, Ross Barkley for Mateo Kovacic, Davide Zappacosta for Cesar Azpilicueta, when he could have sent on Callum Hudson-Odoi for additional firepower. There was no urgency in their play, no variety beyond long passes

UNCONCERNED
I was only worried about my position when I was in League 2 in Italy, not now. I am worried about the results, not about the fans.

from David Luiz, and Jorginho was again a problem rather than a solution as a holding midfielder. The contrast with Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was quite the opposite. The Norwegian has morphed from being United's caretaker boss to a manager with a strong attacking philosophy of his own. Crucially, it is an adaptable philosophy. Missing the injured forwards Anthony Martial and Jesse Lingard, Solskjaer played Juan Mata at the tip of a midfield diamond, Herrera and Pogba tucked in with Nemanja Matic holding. It was similar to their shape that worked so well in the 1-0 Premier League win over Tottenham at Wembley last month.

Romelu Lukaku and Marcus Rashford started up front and the changed formation set the tone for United's more incisive attacking. Sarri believes his situation will be improved significantly if Chelsea can string together a winning run. "It's really very easy. If we are able to win three or four matches in a row, it will be easy," he said. Solskjaer, meanwhile, has urged his men to build on their win and go all the way. "We want to get to the final," he said. "It'll be a tough away (quarter-final) game against Wolves, but it seems like our fans love the away games with (all) that support behind the goal. THE TIMES, LONDON, AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS

Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Thu, 21 Feb 2019				
UE Europe	Sevilla	Lazio	1.00am	LW*
UE Champions	Schalke 04	Manchester City	4.00am	LW*
UE Champions	Atletico Madrid	Juventus	4.00am	LW*

LW* : Telecast not available at Livewire(Singapore Pools)
Visit singaporepools.com for the latest 'Live' telecast listing.

LOTTERY

TOTO

Mon, 18 Feb 2019 Draw No. 3450/2019

Group 1 Prize: \$1,615,432
No Winner

Draw No. 3451/2019 Group 1 Prize \$13,600,000 est.

Next Draw Fri, 22 Feb 2019 9.30pm

Draw Venue: Singapore Pools (Private) Limited, 210 Middle Road, #01-01, Singapore 188994

No person under the age of 18 years shall be allowed to purchase a ticket or to claim any prize.

LW: Livewire (MBS) & Livewire (RWS) (21 years and above)
Livewire (Singapore Pools) (21 years and above during 'Live' telecast)
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All pumped up to answer Call to Greatness

Singaporean mixed martial arts fighter Amir Khan looks hardly impressed as Ariel Sexton flexes his muscles at the open workouts at Evolve at Far East Square yesterday, ahead of One Championship's Call to Greatness event on Friday. Amir, 24, will face the 37-year-old Costa Rican in the quarter-finals of the lightweight Grand Prix at the Singapore Indoor Stadium. The main event is the atomweight muay thai world title bout between Thai Stamp Fairtex and American Janet Todd. Tickets (from \$28) are available at sportshub.com.sg/ONEChampionship
ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

Next 24 Hours

TODAY

FOOTBALL

Uefa Europa League Last 32, 2nd leg: Sevilla v Lazio (Singtel TV Ch110 & StarHub Ch214, tomorrow, 12.55am).

Uefa Champions League Last 16, 1st leg: Atletico v Juventus (Singtel TV Ch112 & StarHub Ch213), Schalke v Man City (Ch110 & Ch214) – tomorrow, 3.55am.

TENNIS

ATP Rio Open Day 3 (StarHub Ch201, tomorrow, 3.30am).

For latest updates, go to singtel.tv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.

SPORT

MY BEST IS YET TO COME: WIE

HSBC Women's c'ship holder admits unfulfilled dreams, eyes No. 1 ranking

David Lee

She was just 16 when the women's world golf rankings were introduced in February 2006, but she had already turned professional four months back, signing sponsorship contracts worth more than US\$10 million (\$\$13.6 million) a year.

Armed with a fluid golf swing, Michelle Wie was compared to top male golfers, earning her monikers such as "The Big Wiesy" (after Ernie Els "The Big Easy") and "the female Tiger Woods".

But the former child prodigy has hardly fulfilled her full potential.

The American won her first Major on her 40th attempt – the 2014 US Women's Open – and has only five LPGA Tour titles.

However, on her day, Wie can still be a contender, as she proved last year by winning the HSBC Women's World Championship at Sentosa Golf Club with a spectacular 45-foot birdie putt on the 18th hole of the New Tanjong Course.

As she returns to defend her title at the US\$1.5 million tournament from Feb 28 to March 3, the 29-year-old told The Straits Times in a phone interview yesterday that her career has not exactly panned out the way she wanted.

"I don't think I have reached my full potential yet... hopefully, the best is yet to come," said Wie, the only child of immigrant parents from South Korea.

A bad fall in 2007 sparked a long battle against niggling wrist injuries – she has just recovered from her latest surgery in October last year.

Despite claiming her maiden LPGA Tour victory at the 2009 Lorena Ochoa Invitational, Wie acknowledged that she has fallen



American golfer Michelle Wie enjoying the moment after winning last year's HSBC Women's World Championship at Sentosa Golf Club. ST FILE PHOTO

short of the high expectations.

The former world No. 2 said: "Being able to graduate from college at Stanford was one of my biggest dreams and winning the US Open was also one."

"But there are a lot more things that I want to accomplish, so hopefully, there are more to come."

Turning 30 in October, she has wistfully seen 13 players reached the top of the world rankings.

Legends like Annika Sorenstam and Ochoa have retired, while for-

mer top-ranked stars like Tseng Ya-ni and Shin Ji-yai are struggling to rediscover their mojo.

Becoming world No. 1 remains one of Wie's ambitions.

"Being No. 1 in the world is the most important thing to me," said the world No. 32.

"Obviously, I made mistakes in the past, and of course there are things I want to change but everything that happened, good or bad, has shaped me to become who I am. It's impossible to have a perfect

career, but I feel like I've achieved many things. I feel very blessed with everything that has come my way.

"In order for me to become world No. 1, I just have to keep doing what I'm doing, be healthy, injury-free and hopefully that will happen."

"I feel great about coming back to Singapore; it's one of my favourite cities in the world. I've played there for many, many years and obviously coming back as a defending champion has a different ring to it,

which is very nice."

Joining Wie in the stellar 63-player field in Singapore are 2009 British Open winner Catriona Matthew and China's up-and-coming LPGA rookie and Instagram sensation He Mu Ni, who received sponsor's invites.

davidlee@sph.com.sg

• For more information on this year's HSBC Women's World Championship, visit hsbcgolf.com/womens

Malaysia's squash star David to retire

KUALA LUMPUR • Eight-time world squash champion Nicol David has announced she will retire at the end of the 2018-2019 season, bringing down the curtain on an illustrious career.

The 35-year-old Malaysian is the most successful woman squash player and spent an unprecedented nine years as world No. 1 between 2006 and 2015.

"After more than 20 years of playing squash for Malaysia, competing on the professional tour and achieving the utmost best... I can proudly say that I am ready and happy to announce my retirement at the end of this seasonal tour," she said in a statement.

"My mind and body have battled it out to stay at the very top of my game for such a long time that I feel that I only have this last big push left for the final season, to give it all I have before I enter the next phase of my life."

David has also won five British Open titles, two Commonwealth Games gold medals, five Asian Games gold medals and three World Games gold medals.

Her reign atop the PSA (Professional Squash Association) world rankings came to an end in September 2015, but she continued to break records, achieving the longest unbroken run inside the world's top five at 143 months.

Her final tournament will either be the British Open in Hull in May or the following month's World Tour Finals if she qualifies.

David, who won her first Asian Games gold in 1998 at the age of 15, also said that she will continue to work closely with the PSA to raise the awareness of squash globally, in an apparent reference to efforts to have the sport included at the Olympics.

David, seeded 13th, will on Saturday begin her quest for a ninth crown in her final World Championship in Chicago.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

Indonesia puts in bid to host 2032 Olympics

JAKARTA • Indonesia has submitted a bid to host the 2032 Olympics, its state news agency announced yesterday, though the nation could also face competition from India and a joint bid by North and South Korea.

Indonesia's Ambassador to Switzerland submitted a letter

from President Joko Widodo to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) last week.

"The IOC has acknowledged Indonesia's capabilities during the Asian Games and Asian Para Games of 2018," the Antara news agency quoted Ambassador Muliaman D. Hadad as saying in reference to In-

donesia winning praise for hosting last year's Asian Games. "We feel that is a strong foundation."

Muddai Madang, the deputy chairman of Indonesia's national Olympic committee, also confirmed the bid yesterday.

He told The Associated Press: "Indonesia is ready to host the

Olympics. What we need now is support from all the Indonesian people and the international community."

IOC president Thomas Bach welcomed the Indonesian candidacy last year when Mr Joko announced the country's plans to bid for the 2032 Games.

"With these Asian Games, with

this great success, Indonesia has shown that they have all the ingredients to hold the Olympics successfully," said Bach.

"Here in Indonesia, there is a great combination of friendliness and efficiency and this is what the Games are about."

If South-east Asia's most popu-

lous nation wins the opportunity to host the Summer Olympics, it would become the fourth Asian country to do so, after Japan, China and South Korea.

The IOC will pick the 2032 Games host by 2025. Tokyo is the venue for next year's Summer Olympics, with Paris hosting the 2024 Games and Los Angeles confirmed as host four years later.

South Korea's Pyeongchang hosted the last Winter Olympics, with Beijing up next for the 2022 edition. REUTERS, DPA

Obituaries

FOR BOOKINGS AND ENQUIRIES, call 1800-289-9988 or 6319-5192

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."



Herbert De Silva
Age: 86

was called home to be with the Lord on 19 Feb 2019, dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Louis Mary Hazel

Sons:

Peter Malcolm De Silva
Joseph Franklin De Silva
James Rozario De Silva

Daughters-in-law:

Geraldine Lee Chiew Ling
Cynthia Daniel

Granddaughters:

Anna Elizabeth De Silva
Andrea Evangeline De Silva

Wake is held at Blk 652 Yishun Ave 4 #05-517, Singapore 760652.

Nightly services will be held at 8.00pm.

Cortege will leave on 23 Feb 2019 (Sat) at 1pm for funeral mass at Church of our Lady Star of the Sea, 10 Yishun St. 22, at 1.30pm and thereafter for Mandai Crematorium Hall 2 for cremation at 3pm.

In Memoriam



CHARLES SIMON

Departed on 20th February 2003

Respected and remembered
by his many relatives and friends

"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Psalms 23



Neo Mary

Age: 66

Was called home to the LORD on 18 February 2019, dearly missed and remembered by loved ones.

Husband: Teo Lam Choon

Son: Kelvin Teo

Daughter: Reina Teo

And all relatives and friends.

Wake at Block 101 Simei Street 1, Singapore 520101.

Cortege leaves on Thursday 21 February 2019 at 8.00am for Mandai Crematorium Hall 2 for cremation at 9.00am.

Obituaries

For enquiries, call

1800-289-9988

(weekdays 8.30am to 6.30pm)



6319-5192

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Tan Kai Yun, 27

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Good time to upgrade your gaming laptop



Nvidia's GeForce RTX 20 Series graphics chips are the first graphics cards capable of real-time ray tracing, a technology often used to produce computer-generated imagery in movies and 3D animation.
PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO

Gamers can expect improved graphics chips, variable refresh rates and slimmer laptops



Vincent Chang

If your gaming notebook is feeling long in the tooth, there is no better time than now to upgrade.

Last month at the CES trade show in Las Vegas, Nvidia chief executive Jensen Huang announced that more than 40 new notebooks powered by the company's latest GeForce RTX 20 Series graphics chips were launched at the end of January.

It has been more than two years since Nvidia last refreshed its notebook graphics chip, arguably the most important component in a gaming laptop.

These new graphics chips are

likely to end up in most gaming notebooks this year. Nvidia holds a 95 per cent market share in gaming laptops, according to market research firm IHS Markit.

"Not only is the graphics performance improved, Nvidia's latest RTX20 series also includes the Turing microarchitecture for machine learning and real-time ray tracing for better photo-realistic performance," says Mr Horse Liu, analyst at IHS Markit.

They are the first graphics cards capable of real-time ray tracing, a technology often used to produce computer-generated imagery in movies and 3D animation. They also have processing cores optimised for artificial intelligence algorithms.

With the new chips, gamers can enjoy more cinematic quality graphics in their games as well as experience better virtual reality (VR) performance (with a compatible VR headset) in the future, says Mr Liu.

In addition to the new graphics chips, the latest gaming notebooks typically come with six-core Intel processors and can support a generous amount of system memory, or RAM, for better gaming and multi-tasking performance.

They also offer fast solid-state storage options, while larger gaming notebooks may have space for a

secondary storage drive, which could be an inexpensive and large hard drive.

Gaming notebooks have become lighter and more portable in recent years and Mr Liu says this trend will continue this year.

Displays, too, appear to be a key focus of improvement among manufacturers as he expects screens that tout high refresh rates and narrow borders, as well as support high dynamic range (HDR) content in new gaming notebooks.

Here are the key features to look out for when shopping for your next gaming notebook.

HIGH REFRESH RATE, VARIABLE REFRESH RATE AND HDR

Most non-gaming screens have a typical refresh rate of 60Hz, which basically means the display's image changes, or refreshes, 60 times each second.

Gaming notebooks often have rates of between 120Hz and 144Hz, and upcoming models are touting refresh rates of up to 240Hz.

The higher the refresh rate, the smoother and more fluid the gaming experience, especially in games with plenty of on-screen action.

In general, gaming laptops can come with standard, high and variable refresh rate displays. High refresh rate displays are great with

games that have matching frame rates, but can otherwise exhibit stuttering and screen tearing visual artefacts.

This is where displays that support variable refresh rate technologies such as Nvidia G-Sync and AMD FreeSync come in. These displays automatically adjust to match a game's frame rate, ensuring a smooth gaming experience at all times.

HDR is another display feature to look out for this year. While it has been around for a while in television sets, HDR is slowly making its way to gaming notebooks, enabling brighter displays that can support a wider spectrum of colours for richer and lush visuals.

ULTRA-THIN LAPTOP DESIGNS

Gaming laptops have slimmed down from the bulky hunks of metal and plastic of the past.

These typically 15-inch notebooks from brands such as Asus, Gigabyte, MSI and Razer now weigh around 2kg or less and are premium models with expensive and lightweight aluminium chassis.

In addition, many now come with slim screen bezels. As a result, some have followed ultrabooks and placed the Web camera at the bottom bezel because the top one is too narrow.

They can also double as a work

computer, with some models from Gigabyte and Razer having a more sedate, professional appearance than the usual flashy gaming machine.

TACTILE KEYBOARDS WITH MILLIONS OF COLOURS

Some manufacturers such as MSI have transplanted a desktop-grade mechanical keyboard to their laptops, but most gaming notebooks do not have the luxury – or the chassis space – for such keyboards.

Instead, some have tried to use low-profile mechanical switches to create a clicky and tactile keyboard, though key travel remains poor. Others may focus on increasing the key travel, but their keyboards still feel mushy.

Gaming laptops also differentiate through the keyboard backlight. An increasing number of models now feature per-key illumination, which means you can change the colour of each key, unlike zonal lighting, which allows you to change a cluster of keys to the same colour.

Most manufacturers will include their own software to adjust the keyboard backlight as well as to create custom gaming macros.

vinchang@sph.com.sg

[MORE STORIES on D2](#)

FROM D1



Action-packed shooting game Battlefield V uses ray tracing to create real-time reflections.

New Nvidia graphics cards give game developers more options

Vincent Chang

We see the world around us when light bounces off objects and into our eyes.

Shadows are produced when light is blocked and refraction occurs when light passes from one medium to another, like from air to glass.

Ray tracing, often dubbed the holy grail of computer graphics, tries to mimic these natural phenomena by simulating the behaviour of light rays to create 3D objects. With ray tracing, rendered images can be extremely photo-realistic.

It is not a new technology – chances are, you have seen its results in the form of computer-generated imagery (CGI) in movies. But ray tracing comes at a price. CGI scenes can take weeks, even months, to produce using render farms consisting of many powerful computers.

While this approach is feasible for movies, ray tracing is not suitable for video game graphics because the images have to be rendered in real time.

Instead, the computing industry found another solution – rasterisation – which uses virtual triangles, called polygons, to create 3D objects.

These polygons are mapped into a 2D plane, along with key information such as the colour and texture to be displayed on a computer screen.

Rasterisation plays to the strengths of computers, which are quick to perform identical tasks.

But it also involves a certain amount of guesswork. And while it is possible to use rasterisation to render accurate and realistic images, the computation cost increases too.

This led Nvidia to take a hybrid approach with its latest generation of graphics cards. The new RTX 20 Series graphics cards can use both rasterisation and ray tracing techniques.

It is up to developers to decide how and when to use each method.

EARLY RAY TRACING IMPRESSIONS

So far, just a handful of released games use ray tracing. None of them relies completely on ray tracing because of the computational cost. Battlefield V, for instance, uses ray tracing to create more accurate real-time reflections, while Metro Exodus uses it to produce more realistic lighting in the game.

As you might imagine, the impact of ray tracing is limited in Battlefield V because it is an action-packed shooting game, not a tour in a house of mirrors.

I had to examine closely to notice ray tracing at work. For instance, the reflections in a puddle on a war-torn street show smoke wafting over the puddle with ray tracing enabled. It is clearly more realistic than the vague shadows passing over the puddle without ray tracing.

On the other hand, ray tracing is far more evident with the first-person shooting game Metro Exodus.

Shadows and enclosed areas with few light sources appear darker

with more depth.

With ray tracing, the weapon in my hand is a dark shadowed outline while turning off ray tracing seems to increase the brightness and lets me see more of the weapon.

In other words, ray tracing gives developers the chance to render a scene more accurately than before. The corner of a room, for instance, may actually be dimmer than what we expect.

Now, whether it is better, from an artistic point of view, is subjective – after all, movie-makers do not always strive for photo-realism in their films.

From what I can tell, ray tracing does not have any impact on game play, especially given its limited implementation in games at the moment. But enabling the feature takes a toll on the game's performance.

In Metro Exodus, with ray tracing set to High, a tier below the maximum Ultra setting, the game ran at around 86 frames per second (fps) at 1,920 x 1,080 pixels on the Asus ROG Zephyrus GX701 with its Nvidia GeForce RTX 2080 (Max-Q) graphics chip.

Turn ray tracing off and the performance went up significantly to reach an average of 121fps.

A similar dip in performance was noticed in Battlefield V, with frame rates falling from 110fps to 63fps once ray tracing was enabled.

While these frame rates are high enough to ensure a smooth gaming experience on the GX701 even with ray tracing enabled, gaming computers with less powerful hardware may not fare as well.

Gaming laptops featuring Nvidia's RTX 20 Series graphics chips

Gigabyte Aero with promising AI

This is the third Gigabyte Aero gaming laptop I have tested in the past three years. All three come in an impressively slim, bezel-free design that belies the powerful computing hardware inside.

The new Aero 15-Y9 updates the graphics chip to the latest GeForce RTX 2080 (Max-Q) and comes with Intel's top mobile processor, the six-core Core i9-8950HK that is said to be built for gaming and content creation.

Gigabyte has made a few cosmetic tweaks to the Aero's design. For instance, the orange highlight on the lid has been removed, though the Gigabyte logo remains backlit. The LED status indicators have also been removed from the front edge of the laptop. The end result is an unassuming look that would not be out of place in the office.

But the narrow screen bezels mean that the Web camera is situated below the display, like in the previous Aero model. This results in less-than-flattering shots of the user's chin and nostrils.

My review set comes with a matte 4K (3,840 x 2,160 pixels) display that looks stunning. It is bright and sharp and has been calibrated by colour management firm X-Rite for colour accuracy. Gigabyte says it has 100 per cent coverage of the Adobe RGB colour gamut, making it suitable for content creators.

The drawbacks of this brilliant display are higher cost and a standard refresh rate of 60Hz, which is passe for a high-end gaming notebook.

Gigabyte does have a 144Hz screen, albeit with a pixel resolution of 1,920 x 1,080 on its lower-end Aero 15. This model, which comes with a slightly less powerful GeForce RTX 2070 graphics chip, is priced at \$3,899.

My souped-up review set, though, costs \$6,099.

I like the keyboard, which feels tactile and has good key travel. It has per-key RGB backlighting that can be adjusted in the preloaded Control Center software. The Microsoft Precision touchpad is of a decent size, allowing users to execute Windows 10's native touchpad gestures with ease.

New to the Aero is the Microsoft Azure AI (artificial intelligence) feature that claims to automatically adjust the laptop settings to provide the best experience for the application in use.

While I had expected the AI to optimise the processor and graphics chip for better performance in games – and it did – I was taken aback when it did more than that.

Notably, the AI recognised that I was running a game benchmark and changed the keyboard backlights to one suited for gamers – the

WASD keys and a few other selected keys were lit up while other unused keys were turned off.

This is an interesting glimpse of what AI can do for gaming computers. Some manufacturers have already roped in professional gamers to create custom profiles for their gaming machines, but an AI with access to how you and other gamers use their computers may produce a better result.

In any case, the performance gains from enabling the AI feature are slight – 5 to 10 per cent on average, depending on the application. The AI will probably get better with time, though.

Given the powerful processor, I had high expectations of the performance.

Unfortunately, the processor may not be running at its full potential because of heat issues. The area right above the keyboard gets very hot while the Aero is running a computationally intensive app. According to a monitoring app, the processor temperature exceeded 85 deg C.

The cooling fans, while loud, are not as noisy as those in other gaming notebooks I have tested.

Running my usual game benchmarks, I recorded an average frame rate of around 109 frames per second (fps) in Crysis 3, compared with 128fps for the same game with the Asus ROG Zephyrus GX701. The Aero is also not as fast as its rival in Doom, registering 103fps compared with the GX701's 130fps.

Its battery life is decent for a gaming notebook, at about three hours. This is significantly longer than the GX701's 1hr 40min.

*** Verdict: Gigabyte refreshes its ultra-thin Aero laptop with the latest computing hardware, but its performance seems stymied by heat. Its AI feature shows promise, though.**

Vincent Chang



SPECS

PRICE: \$6,099
PROCESSOR: Intel Core i9-8950HK (2.9GHz)
GRAPHICS: Nvidia GeForce RTX 2080 GDDR6 8GB
RAM: 32GB DDR4
SCREEN SIZE: 15.6 inches, 3,840 x 2,160 pixels
CONNECTIVITY: Thunderbolt 3, 2x USB 3.1 Gen 1 Type-A, 1x USB 3.1 Gen 2 Type-A, 1x USB 3.1 Type-C, HDMI, Gigabit Ethernet port, SD card reader, audio jack
BATTERY: 94 watt-hour

RATING

FEATURES: 4/5
DESIGN: 4/5
PERFORMANCE: 4/5
VALUE FOR MONEY: 3/5
BATTERY LIFE: 2/5
OVERALL: 4/5

Powerful Zephyrus gets a tad hot

Asus has picked its ultra-thin ROG Zephyrus gaming laptop series to showcase Nvidia's flagship GeForce RTX 2080 (Max-Q design) graphics chip.

The new entry in the Zephyrus series, the GX701 sports a 17.3-inch screen compared with the 15-inch display on the previous GX501 model. The older laptop, though, remains a very capable gaming computer as it uses Nvidia's previous generation flagship GeForce GTX 1080 (Max-Q design).

Besides the larger screen, which contributes to the increased weight (from 2.2kg to 2.7kg), the new GX701 is mostly identical to its predecessor.

Notably, it retains the proprietary cooling system, dubbed Active Aerodynamic System, of the laptop series. It is a unique air-intake system whereby a flap at the laptop base opens to suck in cool air.

Asus says the four cooling fans inside the laptop have an anti-dust tunnel to catch dust from the large intake and direct them out of the chassis.

I found this cooling system rather fragile on the previous Zephyrus laptop and the new version does not change my mind. In fact, the thin flap feels even more flimsy, probably because it now extends across a wider 17.3-inch notebook. The panel's middle section sags and flexes under the slightest pressure, which does not inspire confidence.

Like its predecessor, the GX701 has the keyboard right up to the front edge, so there is no support for the wrist. On the other hand, your fingers are further from the warmer parts of the laptop, which can get rather toasty when it is running at full power.

Key travel is decent for a slim gaming laptop (just under 19mm thick), while Asus has also added per-key RGB backlighting to the keyboard, a popular feature that was previously unavailable.

The touchpad has been shifted to the right, where the numeric keypad usually is. However, you can press a key to disable the touchpad, turning it into a virtual numeric keypad.

There are a few other minor tweaks. For instance, there is a scroll wheel to adjust the volume, which is handy for games and videos.

To enable a narrow bezel above the screen, Asus has removed the Web camera, instead bundling a USB-powered camera that comes with a clip to attach to the laptop.

The display has also been upgraded. It has a higher 144Hz refresh rate compared with the previous model's 120Hz version. The



screen resolution is unchanged at 1,920 x 1,080 pixels, which I feel is optimal for a gaming laptop.

It still supports Nvidia's G-Sync technology, which can reduce stutter and lag caused by inconsistent frame rates.

More importantly, the display looks brighter and more vibrant. Given that the GX701 comes with a powerful six-core Intel processor, as well as its new graphics chip, I was expecting a significant boost in performance over its predecessor.

It seemed the case in Crysis 3 at Very High setting, where it produced 128 frames per second (fps) on average, compared with 104fps for the older GX501. But there was no performance gain in Doom, where both laptops scored around 130fps at Ultra setting.

In the system benchmark PC-Mark 10, the overall score also went up from 5,587 on the GX501 to 6,042 for the GX701.

But the fans did become much louder during these benchmark tests, though they were not as noisy as some other gaming laptops.

Even while the laptop is idling, the area above the keyboard felt warm and it tipped into too-hot-to-touch territory when running a game. A monitoring app reported the peak temperature of the graphics chip at 90 deg C.

Like most gaming laptops, the GX701 has poor battery stamina. It lasted 1hr 40min in our video-loop battery test with the screen brightness set to maximum.

*** Verdict: Not everyone will agree with the design decisions needed to achieve its slim build. But it is a very capable gaming laptop – though it runs very warm when playing video games.**

Vincent Chang

SPECS

PRICE: \$4,998
PROCESSOR: Intel Core i7-8750H (2.2GHz)
GRAPHICS: Nvidia GeForce GTX 2080 GDDR6 (Max-Q)
RAM: 24GB DDR4
SCREEN SIZE: 17.3 inches, 1,920 x 1,080 pixels
CONNECTIVITY: USB 3.1 Gen 2 Type-C, USB 3.1 Gen 1 Type-C, USB 3.1 Gen 2 Type-A, 2x USB 3.1 Gen 1 Type-A, HDMI, audio jack
BATTERY: 76 watt-hour

RATING

FEATURES: 4/5
DESIGN: 3.5/5
PERFORMANCE: 5/5
VALUE FOR MONEY: 3/5
BATTERY LIFE: 1/5
OVERALL: 4/5

Slate 15 does a cool job at a good price

Fans of Aftershock and its competitively priced, custom gaming computers will be delighted to know that the local firm's latest Slate 15 gaming laptop is an entirely new design packed with features not found on Aftershock's older models.

These features, though, are the icing on the cake because the Slate 15 is powered by the latest computing hardware.

Buyers can choose among the three major variants of Nvidia's RTX 20 graphics chips (RTX 2060, RTX 2070 and RTX 2080), though the higher-end 2070 and 2080 chips are the Max-Q models with more conservative clock speeds.

They can also customise the amount of system memory (RAM) and internal storage. A fully tricked-out model can have up to 32GB RAM and 2TB of fast solid-state storage.

Despite the Slate 15 moniker, the laptop actually has a 16.1-inch screen and not the standard 15.6-inch display.

Aftershock says the slim bezel design of the Slate laptop is the reason it could fit the slightly larger screen while keeping a similar footprint as 15-inch gaming laptops.

Its matte screen boasts a 144Hz refresh rate, which is useful for less-demanding games that can run at high frame rates. The colours look good and viewing angles are impeccable. It could be a tad brighter, though.

Its aluminium chassis is slim and portable, though its 19.9mm thickness and its 2.1kg weight are hardly remarkable in these days of ultra-slim gaming laptops. Aftershock has also bundled a relatively small power adapter with the laptop.

I like its clean design, without the automotive-inspired aesthetics of many gaming notebooks. You can rev up the bling factor by paying for a custom paint job from Aftershock.

A new feature is an optical fingerprint sensor embedded under the glass touchpad. It is similar to the ones seen on some smartphones – a fingerprint icon lights up to indicate where to place your finger. But I feel it is not as fast or as accurate as a traditional fingerprint reader.

The touchpad is a Microsoft precision touchpad, which means it natively supports multi-touch gestures in Windows 10.

Typical of a gaming laptop, the keyboard is backlit, with each key having its own coloured LED with millions of colours available. The keys themselves have a good amount of travel and a somewhat tactile feel, though they still appear more mushy than clicky to me.

More importantly, these keys do not feel warm while I am playing a game, which taxes the laptop graphics



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ics chip. Aftershock says the cooling system has been improved, with new fans that can spin at up to a relatively fast 6,000rpm.

In my testing, the maximum temperature of the graphics chip reported by a monitoring app was 74 deg C – lower than 80 to 90 deg C on some gaming notebooks.

The fans can become rather loud, though I soon got used to the constant droning noise. It helps, too, that Aftershock has put impressively loud speakers on the Slate 15. And they also sound deeper and wider than the speakers in previous Aftershock laptops.

My review set comes with the Nvidia GeForce RTX 2070 (Max-Q) graphics chip and the latest six-core Intel Core i7-8750H processor.

In Crysis 3, it managed about 101 frames per second (fps) at Very High setting. In comparison, the Asus ROG Zephyrus GX701, which has a higher-end RTX 2080 chip, scored 128fps. The Slate was also second-best to the GX701 in Doom (Ultra setting), managing 115fps to the GX701's 130fps.

Its battery stamina is relatively good for a gaming laptop. It lasted 3hr 45min in our video-loop battery test with the screen brightness set to maximum.

*** Verdict: Aftershock gets the basics right with the Slate 15, which has a good display and loud speakers, and runs relatively cool. It is priced competitively too.**

Vincent Chang

SPECS

PRICE: \$2,859
PROCESSOR: Intel Core i7-8750H (2.2GHz)
GRAPHICS: Nvidia GeForce GTX 2070 GDDR6 (Max-Q)
RAM: 16GB DDR4
SCREEN SIZE: 16.1 inches, 1,920 x 1,080 pixels
CONNECTIVITY: 2x USB 3.0, 2x USB 3.1 Gen 2 Type-C, HDMI, mini-DisplayPort, Gigabit Ethernet port, SD card reader, audio jacks
BATTERY: 62 watt-hour

RATING

FEATURES: 4/5
DESIGN: 4/5
PERFORMANCE: 4.5/5
VALUE FOR MONEY: 4/5
BATTERY LIFE: 2/5
OVERALL: 4.5/5

Gaming

God Eater 3 gorgeous to view, fun to play

Nizam Mohd

For the uninitiated, God Eater 3 is the third title of the Japanese role-playing game franchise God Eater, which debuted in 2010.

With a number of revamps and remakes between the main instalments, it is actually the ninth release.

It is also the first title not designed for handhelds and is exclusive to the PlayStation 4 and Windows platforms.

Shift, the developer of past God Eater titles, has passed the helm to Marvelous First Studio, which is famed for developing the critically acclaimed Senran Kagura, Soul Sacrifice and Fate/Extella series.

Set in a futuristic, post-apocalyptic setting where bio-mechanical creatures roam, you start off as a young adult whose wrists are shackled by armlets.

A brief but painful test experiment turns you into an Adaptive God Eater, capable of wielding special weapons.

Being a God Eater also allows you to use your weapon to devour creatures, which in turn lets you unleash burst attacks that deal more damage. You can select the gender as well as change the name and appearance of your character. But while the customisation options are decent, they are not as elaborate as they could be.

For example, you have only 10 hairstyles to choose from and you

cannot select body size. As a result, every character model looks like a new age pop star.

For a game designed for platforms that can accommodate large storage, the absence of elaborate enhancements and options feels like a missed opportunity.

That said, with the game needing less than 20GB of storage, it lets gamers squeeze another game into their precious library space.

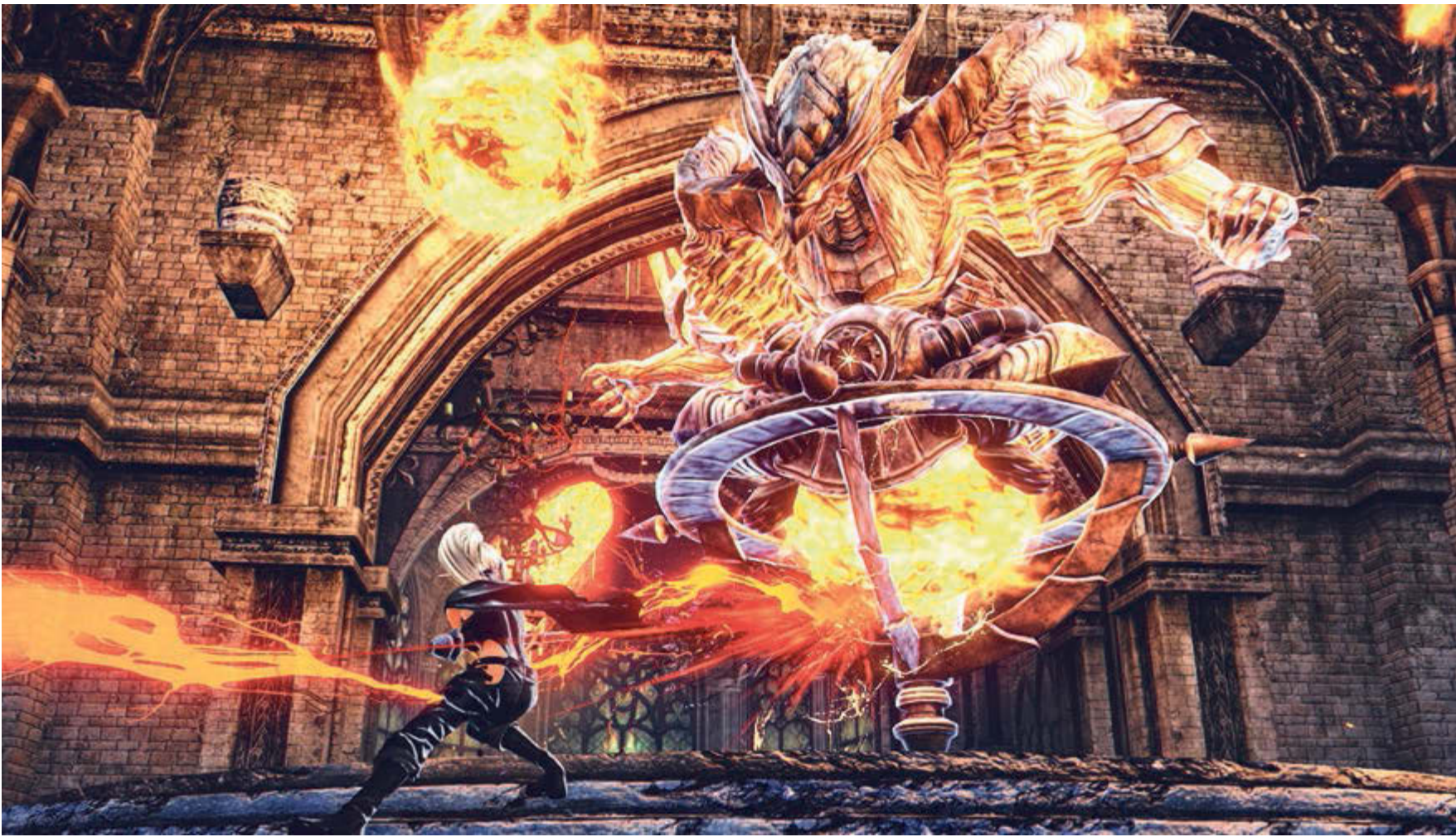
You can enhance your proficiency by switching among various melee and range weapons, known as God Arcs. My favourite is the Heavy Moon as it can morph into three different forms to maximise its effectiveness.

Graphics appear more polished compared with previous releases. Character models look sharper and I enjoy examining the weapon designs up close.

As always, the anime cut-scenes are entertaining to watch, whether in Japanese or English audio. Turn up the volume to immerse yourself in the mesmerising soundtrack compiled by returning composer Go Shina.

The standard missions are designed to be fast and furious. Jump into the map, locate your target monster (known as Aragami) and you can complete the objective within a short time.

You have artificial intelligence characters as companions and can share combat perks with them when you are in close proximity by activating a feature called Engage system.



If you are up to the challenge, you can take on Ash Aragami, which is higher-tier creatures that possess similar God Eater powers and are more aggressive. You can also battle them online with up to eight players cooperatively.

The only drawback is that you have just five minutes to take the monster down, failing which you will take home fewer rewards.

While it is a brief affair, playing online allows you to show off your

created character and skills.

Another thing I like about this game – publisher Bandai Namco reportedly plans to release new content for God Eater 3 that can be downloaded online without charge. This is a welcome change from the recent trend of micro-transactions.

*** Verdict: Polished graphics and features as well as AI companions make God Eater 3 an enjoyable affair.**

• Nizam Mohd is a freelance writer.

SPECS

PRICE: From \$579.90 (PC, PS4, version tested)
GENRE: Role-playing game
RATING: 8/10

In God Eater 3, players jump into the map, locate their target monsters and bring them down.

Crackdown 3 a huge letdown

Lester Wong

Crackdown 3 marks a return for the open world shooter franchise after 8½ years, but back with a bang it is not.

Available now on PC and Xbox One, Crackdown 3's problem is not that it does anything badly, but that it does not do anything well enough to stand out in today's crowded action-adventure genre.

In the game, the player reprises the role of a superpower Agent from a shadowy city-funded organisation known as the Agency. A terrorist attack has cut power across the globe and you are one of the agents tasked with tracking down the terrorists in the city of New Providence.

The initial strike fails spectacularly, leaving you as the sole survivor to take on the hordes of mega-corporation Terra Nova and its evil leaders.

While the game's plot is really just an excuse for the shoot-up action to follow, promotional trailers had promised a generous serving of the effervescent Terry Crews (most recently seen in hit television series Brooklyn Nine-Nine), who plays team commander Isaiah Jaxon.

But after a memorable opening cut-scene, there is barely anything to distinguish Crews' character from the other 20 selectable agent skins.

The game's general lack of personality – from player avatars to creeps to boss fights – means that much of the single player campaign can feel like ticking items off a list rather than the one-man crusade against dastardly villains it is supposed to be.

Crackdown 3 is not helped by its lacklustre graphics, which give the game a dated feel.

I had to remind myself several times, after yet another low-resolution walkway, that I was playing a game released in 2019 and one by Microsoft Studios at that.

Crackdown 3's "practice makes perfect" levelling system is its one saving grace.

As a newcomer to the series, I found shooting enemies to get better at shooting, and hitting them at close range to get better at melee, refreshing and intuitive.

Agility Orbs, which improve the player's mobility and must be collected, are the exception.

I was not a fan of tracking down the 1,000 orbs in total, although this could appeal to completionists. Combat itself, however, is as



Actor Terry Crews lends his face to team commander Isaiah Jaxon in Crackdown 3.

anonymous as the game's player avatars.

You point, you shoot, you kill, which in the absence of a unique mechanic or gimmick is no different from any other shooter out there.

Crackdown 3 also has a multiplayer mode called Wrecking Zone, featuring destructible environments.

But to my disappointment, I did not get to try it during my review period as it was not yet ready.

I had a brief turn on it after the

game was launched. It was different enough from the single player mode to almost warrant a separate review, but my initial impression was that Wrecking Zone lacks depth like the rest of the game.

It turned out to be the last of a series of disappointments for a decidedly underwhelming game.

*** Verdict: With a bland story, dated graphics and cookie-cutter combat, Crackdown 3's undoing.**

SPECS

PRICE: \$75 (PC, Xbox One, version tested)
GENRE: Action-adventure third-person shooter
RATING: 6/10

Photo



Capturing fast-moving subjects such as toddlers is a breeze as the camera's Eye AF ensures their eyes are open and in focus.

Attractive compact for selfie lovers

Sony α6400 is quick to autofocus and its touchscreen can flip 180 degrees

Trevor Tan

The α6400 is the latest mid-range APS-C mirrorless camera from Sony, replacing the nearly three-year-old α6300.

While the α6400 has the same number of phase-detection autofocus (AF) points as its predecessor (425), it has significantly more contrast-detection AF points compared with the α6300 (425 vs 169).

Other major upgrades include, according to its maker, having the world's fastest AF acquisition of 0.02 seconds, real-time Eye AF and real-time subject tracking.

Eye AF might not be new, but you now do not need to assign a custom button to it. Instead, Eye AF automatically works when the shutter release is half-pressed.

More interestingly, a firmware update sometime this year will enable Eye AF for animals as well. Great for wildlife photographers.

For this review, I used the Sony 16-50mm f/3.5-5.6 powered zoom kit lens with the α6400.

Focus lock is instantaneous in bright sunlight. Even in dim lighting, it takes at most 1.1 seconds to secure a focus with the aid of the

AF assist light.

Furthermore, coupled with real-time Eye AF and real-time tracking, the camera will help keep your subjects in focus even if they are running all over the place.

As such, capturing fast-moving subjects such as toddlers becomes a breeze as Eye AF ensures their eyes are open and in focus at the decisive moment.

Image quality is fantastic for its class. Pictures look sharp and vivid with plenty of details, even in darker areas.

Noise performance is also superb. There are very few visible noise artefacts even at ISO 3,200. Noise artefacts are more evident at ISO 6,400, but there is little detail loss and only slight blurring. Only at ISO 12,800 and above do the noise artefacts became obvious with significant detail loss.

Design-wise, the α6400 looks like its predecessor. Its magnesium body is resistant to dust and moisture. The rubberised grip and ergonomic rear thumb rest accommodate all my fingers for a good grip on the camera.

Button layout is well thought out. The Mode and command dials on the top, along with the many buttons at the rear, are all within easy reach when you want to change settings.

While the α6300 has a non-touchscreen 3-inch display at the rear that can be flipped up by only 90 degrees, the α6400's similarly sized display is a touchscreen that can be flipped up by 180 degrees, which is

ideal for selfie lovers and video bloggers.

When flipped up at 180 degrees, the camera will automatically set the shutter release to the three-second timer mode. And you cannot switch from this to any other shutter release mode. This can get quite irritating as you have to wait to take the selfie.

In terms of operation, the α6400 is on a par with its predecessor, with start-up and shutdown operations each taking 1.4 seconds – quicker than the 2-second start-up and shutdown times of most mirrorless cameras.

Using an SD card with a writing speed of 94MB per second, the α6400 captured 50 RAW images in 5.6 seconds before the buffer ran out. In comparison, the α6300 could capture only 24 RAW images in 2.2 seconds.

Battery life is average at 360 still images on a full charge – not much of a difference compared with its predecessor.

But the α6400 uses micro-USB charging, which is convenient when you are travelling. It means one less charger to take along and you can use a power bank to charge it as well.

trevtan@sph.com.sg

● **Verdict: If you have the Sony α6300, you probably can skip this. If not, the α6400 is an attractive compact mirrorless camera with fast autofocus speed at a reasonable price.**

Sigma 40mm f/1.4 a heavyweight performer

Trevor Tan

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Japanese lensmaker Sigma has released several fast prime lenses recently. One of them is the 40mm f/1.4 DG HSM Art, available for Sigma, Sony E-mount, Nikon F-mount and Canon EF-mount (version tested) interchangeable lens cameras.

Given that Sigma's stable already includes the 35mm f/1.4 DG HSM Art and 50mm f/1.4 DG HSM Art, you might wonder why there was a need to release a 40mm lens.

Apparently, the 40mm focal length is popular with many filmmakers, including Quentin Tarantino, Francis Ford Coppola and Wes Anderson. Sigma released this lens to cater to their needs.

The lens has 16 glass elements – including three F Low Dispersion and three Special Low Dispersion glass elements – arranged in 12 groups. This design is said to help minimise chromatic aberration, flare and ghosting, as well as reduce distortions to less than 1 per cent.

Users can also expect the bokeh, or out-of-focus areas, to be beautiful due to the use of nine aperture blades in a rounded diaphragm design.

The lens structure is said to be resistant to dust and water splashes. Plus, there is a water- and oil-repellent coating on the front lens element for shooting in challenging conditions.

When I first hold the lens, I am struck by how big and heavy it is. It is bigger than most wide-angle zoom lenses and weighs a whopping 1.2kg. By comparison, my eight-year-old Canon EOS 7D weighs 860g without a lens.

For this review, I use the EOS 7D to test the lens' autofocus (AF) speed and Sony's 42.4-megapixel α7R II (using Sigma's MC-11 E-mount converter) to test the lens' optical quality with high-resolution still images.



The Sigma 40mm f/1.4 DG HSM Art weighs 1.2kg, but takes sharp photos with fantastic bokeh.

The AF is not exactly fast, but not slow either. It takes less than one second to lock a focus with the 7D in dim lighting. With the α7R II, the lens takes about two seconds to secure a focus in dim lighting, even during video recording. The biggest bugbear, though, is that I can clearly hear the AF motor working during video recording, regardless of the camera I used.

Chromatic aberrations and glares are well controlled throughout the aperture range. And I do not notice any distortion during this review.

Overall, this is one amazing prime lens. In fact, it is easily one of the sharpest lenses I have tested.

Images might be a tad soft when the aperture is set at the maximum f/1.4. But this is to be expected when the aperture is so huge. There is also clear vignetting at f/1.4. But the bokeh looks fantastic.

If you want really sharp images with nice bokeh, shoot at f/2 with this lens. It is a nice compromise between sharpness and pleasant bokeh.

Centre sharpness is excellent from f/2 to the minimum aperture size. Edge sharpness is visibly softer from f/1.4 to f/2, but becomes much sharper at f/2.8 and remains consistent from f/2.8 to f/16.

Vignetting becomes less of an issue when the aperture is stopped down to f/2.8. But there are some who prefer the vignetting effect, so it is down to personal preference.

● **Verdict: The Sigma 40mm f/1.4 DG HSM Art is easily one of the best prime lenses in the market.**

SPECS

PRICE: \$1,788 (Canon-mount, version tested; Nikon-mount; Sigma-mount; Sony E-mount)

MAXIMUM APERTURE: f/1.4

MINIMUM APERTURE: f/16

MINIMUM FOCUSING DISTANCE: 40cm

WEIGHT: 1.2kg

RATING

DESIGN: 4/5

PERFORMANCE: 5/5

VALUE FOR MONEY: 4.5/5

OVERALL: 4.5/5

Gaming

Battle it out with this nimble robot

Vincent Chang

Growing up, I was fed a steady diet of cartoons featuring giant robots – Robotech, Transformers and Voltron – fighting to save the world from evil.

So I was intrigued and eager to try the Geio battle bot from Chinese firm GJS, which was funded successfully on the Kickstarter crowd-funding platform in just 18 hours in 2017. This toy robot has been available in Singapore since the end of last year from local distributor Ban Leong and is now sold at Best Denki and other consumer electronics stores.

From the polish of Geio's packaging, you can tell that this squat, four-legged droid is not GJS' first rodeo.

Unlike the company's earlier Ganker robot, which wields a large sword for close combat, Geio sports a gun turret that shoots virtual bullets at enemies. Its front camera cap-

tures and streams what the robot sees (first-person view) to your smartphone via the Geio app (for iOS and Android).

Geio feels sturdy and well-built and is made from aluminium and plastic. Its removable 2,000mAh battery is charged via a micro-USB port. GJS says the battery lasts about 40 minutes on a single charge. It takes more than two hours to fully recharge the battery.

The robot tries to give the impression of being sentient when turned on. It will move its turret in short, jerky movements, make a squawking noise or blink the single eye displayed on a small LCD screen at its front.

It takes just a few easy steps to get the robot up and running – connect to its Wi-Fi network and run the Geio app. Like a mobile game, you move the robot and aim its gun using controls that overlay the first-person view from Geio's camera. It can also be controlled by tilting

your smartphone like a steering wheel.

Note that the robot uses a 5GHz Wi-Fi channel, which may not be supported on budget or older devices.

The video feed from the camera is not the sharpest and exhibits a slight latency. It is likely compressed to conserve bandwidth, but is adequate to show the robot's surroundings. You can record a video or take a photo using the camera with the app.

The quality of the video seems to deteriorate when the robot moves farther from your smartphone – I recommend being in the same room as the robot.

It is deceptively fast, accelerating from rest to zoom towards a target in a split second. It is also very nimble, thanks to its omni-directional wheels – you do not need to rotate the robot towards your intended direction before setting off. But it does take a while to get used to its



Geio from Chinese firm GJS moves quickly and sports a gun turret that shoots virtual bullets at enemies.

manoeuvrability and requires more practice to make use of it to outflank an enemy robot.

The app offers a few game modes, such as Race, Battle and Explore. As their names suggest, Race and Battle are multiplayer modes that require a second robot, while Explore lets you see your surroundings

from the low vantage point of the robot.

Battles are usually short and intense, though you can spice things up by adding the included totems – cards with printed symbols – to the playing field. Scan these totems with the robot's camera to acquire power-ups, such as virtual bullets

that slow down your opponent.

Each robot is priced at \$299, though the cost is effectively \$598 since a pair is required for a robot duel.

● **Verdict: A polished toy robot that impresses with its nimble and fast movements.**

SPECS

PRICE: \$299

SUPPORTED PLATFORMS: iOS/Android

CONNECTIVITY: Wi-Fi (5GHz channel)

WEIGHT: 730g

BATTERY: 2,000mAh

RATING

FEATURES: 4/5

DESIGN: 4/5

VALUE FOR MONEY: 3/5

OVERALL: 3.5/5

Tech life hacks

A family that games together stays together

The rise of screen individualism at home was becoming a concern so I found activities my wife and gaming daughters could enjoy



Oo Gin Lee

At last count, there are 11 screens in my home – two televisions, four smartphones, two iPads and three PCs.

TV time is spent watching Netflix, YouTube and HBO – all running as apps on the smart TVs. Free-to-air content is almost non-existent in the Oo household.

Our TVs double as screens for our console gaming habit – our PlayStation 4 Pro, Xbox One X and Nintendo Switch are all wired up to the 55-inch 4K Samsung TV in our living room.

The iPads, including my favourite 12.9-inch iPad Pro, are used mainly for gaming. As for the smartphones, they have become personal handheld gaming machines for my two older girls.

The abundance of screens at home never used to be a problem because my family used to watch TV together when my kids were younger.

Playing console games was also a together-affair because we would play multiplayer games such as Kinect Sports and Dance Central together.

But in recent times, I have started worrying as we are increasingly becoming five individuals looking at our own individual screens.

I used to smirk at guys who would hang out playing individual games on their own mobile phones. They might be having the last laugh now.

My wife spends most of her screen time watching YouTube.

My youngest daughter, S, is a fan of Netflix Kids, and when her daily viewing limit of two hours is up, she moves to the desktop computer in the room to print art-and-craft stuff or to log into the school's e-learning portal.

My second daughter, K, is an extreme mobile gamer. She masterfully slides her fingers across the six-inch screen in music rhythm games to break high scores that look impossible to beat.

I am a huge supporter of K's new interest in playing the clarinet and she has become particularly good at repetitive finger training – both on the smartphone and on the woodwind.

My eldest girl, N, has finished every quest – main and sides – in

the Switch game Legend Of Zelda. It is a feat that must have taken her hundreds of hours of playtime.

Thankfully, N has recently discovered a new "screen" – an aquarium – which she has spent weeks to set up and is now populated with two guppies.

As for me, I am still an avid gamer who spends an hour a day gaming on the PC, console or iPad.

The rise of screen individualism is becoming a serious concern.

When N was the only child, we did everything with her. Barney the purple dinosaur became the family favourite and I hardly had time to play the games I liked. When K came along, the two of them started playing together, which let my wife and I have more personal time.

But now, with three girls and the older two in their teenage years, we are increasingly spending less time doing things together at home because of our individual preferences.

When I reached this epiphany a few months ago, I decided to start making small changes. I bought another two PlayStation

controllers so that all four of us (my wife is not quite into games) can now play Overcooked 2 together.

The three girls are also big fans of one-on-one fighting games such as Naruto Ultimate Ninja Storm and Street Fighter V and they spend a lot of time challenging one another.

S has become quite good in Ninja Storm and she squeals in delight when her character blasts mine to smithereens with the latest ninja jutsu (special attack).

And to get the whole family involved, I look for family movies on Netflix that we can enjoy together.

I know it's not possible to stop my kids from playing games as I am such a huge gamer myself.

I guess the next best option is to game together – less single-player odysseys such as God Of War and more family-oriented multiplayer games like Overcooked.

stlife@sph.com.sg

• Oo Gin Lee was a tech editor with The Straits Times and is a proud father of three gaming girls.

New products



Panasonic Lumix S1R

MIRRORLESS CAMERA

Pricing to be confirmed, available in April

Panasonic has revealed the full specifications of its upcoming mirrorless camera, the Lumix S1R. They include a mouth-watering 47.3-megapixel full-frame CMOS sensor and a High Resolution mode for shooting 187-megapixels stills.

The S1R will use the L-mount, developed by Leica, and supports L-mount lenses made by Leica and Sigma. It will come with a tiltable 3.2-inch display and an ultra high-resolution electronic viewfinder.



The Nuraphone

OVER-EAR HEADPHONES

\$629, available on March 7

This is not your usual over-ear headphones. The Nuraphone learns and adapts to your hearing.

It works by emitting a range of tones into the ear and then measuring the very faint sounds that the ear generates in response. The measurements are used to create a unique hearing profile that lets the headphones sonically shape any music that is being played to match the listener's hearing and to deliver all the details of the music.



ROG Strix XG438Q

GAMING MONITOR

Pricing and availability to be confirmed

PC gamers looking for the best playing experience should consider the ROG Strix XG438Q. This 43-inch gaming monitor is the world's biggest 4K (3,840 x 2,160 pixels) gaming monitor to support

AMD's Freesync 2 HDR technology, according to its maker. FreeSync 2 HDR reduces visual tearing and offers smoother gameplay and high dynamic range when used with AMD Radeon graphics cards.

The XG438Q has a refresh rate of 120Hz, a response time of four milliseconds and offers 90 per cent DCI-P3 colour coverage. It comes with three HDMI 2.0 input ports, a DisplayPort port and a pair of 10W speakers.



Razer Huntsman Quartz Edition

GAMING KEYBOARD

\$229.90

If you are tired of black keyboards, check out the new pink version of the Razer Huntsman gaming keyboard – dubbed the Quartz Edition.

Unlike most mechanical gaming keyboards in the market, the Huntsman uses Razer's Opto-Mechanical, or optical mechanical, switches. They work by having a constant beam of light blocked by the switch stem under each key. When a key is pressed, light passes through to register a key press. Thus, you can game at the speed of light while marvelling at the keyboard's gorgeous pink exterior.



Adidas Ultraboost 19

RUNNING SHOES

\$280, available from tomorrow

The Adidas Ultraboost running shoes series is renowned for excellent rebound and the Ultraboost 19 is its most responsive model.

The shoes have 20 per cent more of Adidas' Boost material in the midsole, compared with other models in the series, for higher energy return. They also feature an updated Torsion Spring arch-support system that helps runners move more effortlessly and a 3D Heel Frame that cradles the foot on impact for support and stability. A one-piece Primeknit 360 upper snugly wraps the foot for better comfort.

Compiled by Trevor Tan

Boogie at Singapore Design Week



This year's festival will feature a roller disco and heritage clan houses

Michelle Ng

Mark your calendars, Singapore Design Week is rolling into town with new programmes and activities, including many that will appeal to the younger crowd. The annual festival, which is in its sixth edition, celebrates all things design with more than 80 events over two weeks at various locations around Singapore.

Organised by the DesignSingapore Council, the festival will be held from March 4 to 17. Many of the events are free of charge, although some design talks and workshops are ticketed. An addition this year is Street of Clans, a festival which will be held along Bukit Pasoh Road to draw focus to the heritage clan houses in the area, such as Chin Kang Huay Kuan and Koh Clan, through design installations, workshops, talks, food and live music. Mr Mark Wee, executive director of DesignSingapore Council, says having street activities "makes it easier for the public to consume design in an accessible manner and to learn more about it along the way". An interesting event to watch out for is Singapore Urban Design Festival.

It will be held on the top two floors of a multi-storey carpark in Jalan Besar. There will be a 1980s-themed rooftop roller disco, drag shows, Instagram-worthy photo spots and live DJ sets. As part of the design week, there will also be urban design innovation talks on the topics of resources, mobility and community. Other highlights include SingaPlural, a design exhibition based on the theme, Unnatural Phenomena, exploring how evolution in nature inspires design, as well as master lectures, such as one by United States-based associate art director Raffi Lehrer, who curates the art works at music festival Coachella. The public can also get to see the actual furniture pieces used in last year's Crazy Rich Asians movie.

At the International Furniture Fair Singapore, a long-standing trade show held during the design week, home-accessories brand Sam & Sara will display furniture pieces from the film. The Buyers Lounge, where the pieces are shown, is open to the public on March 12 and pieces can be bought onsite. This year's fair will be held for the first time at Sands Expo and Convention Centre to showcase furniture from designers around the region. Meanwhile, the Wallpaper* Handmade 2019 exhibition will feature works from seven established local designers and design studios, including Chris Lee and Hans Tan, and one from young Lasalle graduate Brandon Yeo. After debuting at Singapore

Design Week, the eight pieces will be shown at Milan Design Week. Since the Singapore Design Week's inception in 2014, the number of attendees has been growing steadily. Last year, more than 300,000 visitors attended the festival. The DesignSingapore Council expects more visitors this year, but says it is more focused on improving the quality of the programmes. Mr Wee says: "We're covering pertinent topics in the design landscape, such as the circular economy and sensible urban design, with something for everyone, be it the public or industry insider."

The Singapore Urban Design Festival will be held on the top two floors of a multi-storey carpark in Jalan Besar and will include a 1980s-themed rooftop roller disco. PHOTO: SINGAPORE URBAN DESIGN FESTIVAL

ngmich@sph.com.sg
• For more information, go to www.designsingapore.org/sdw

Dreamy landscapes and latex on the catwalks of London Fashion Week

LONDON • The dreamlike elegance of Roksan, earthy shades of JW Anderson and a rubber-inspired collection from Christopher Kane were among the highlights of the fourth day of London Fashion Week on Monday. Serbian designer Roksan, a growing force in the British fashion world since her 2005 debut, took over a large warehouse-like space in the West End Selfridges department store, a temple of fashion and luxury consumption for her much-anticipated show. The designer, who regularly dresses A-List stars such as the Duchess of Cambridge Kate Middleton, United States First Lady Melania Trump and actress Emma Stone, dusted the catwalk with a fine coat of white sand, illuminated by artificial rainbows, to conjure a dreamy landscape. Her wardrobe echoed the laid-back, contemplative mood, with long, fluid dresses nonchalantly tied at the waist or shoulder, in the style of the Roman toga. lincic, who operates in 40 countries, made sparing use of gabardine, silk and satin, which she fashioned into geometric compositions inspired by her architectural background. Renowned for her ability to create subtle and harmonious colour combinations, the designer said backstage that her choice of a palette dominated by brown, gold and fuchsia was guided by "a lot of intuition". She said: "Obviously, after that I have my very precious box with lots of colour swatches, some are fabrics, some are little swatches from books or postcards." Northern Irish designer JW Anderson also presented his

fashion house's autumn/winter 2019 collection, calling it an "exploration of volume and proportions" and an "aristocratic continuation of the juxtapositions that imbue" his brand. "JW Anderson is about going from one thing to the next, about polar opposites," he said backstage after the show. "The dresses with the thread going through, they just happened. We were improvising colours. It's kind of like we were taking a huge needle through the fabric. It just stuck." His models strode down the catwalk wearing leather baseball caps high on their heads, with an earthy palette and a mixture of leathers and studding defining the collection. Christopher Kane, recognised as a driving force behind the "British New Wave" of designers, injected a more experimental atmosphere with his show at a deserted office building in the heart of London, evoking fashion's darker underbelly. Small, ultra-short bustier dresses, enhanced with a touch of lace, were decorated with intriguing transparent pockets containing coloured liquids, while "human obsessions" were explored with fetish-inspired rubber balloons and latex gloves printed on T-shirts and dresses. The Scottish designer is also a celebrity favourite, dressing pop star Lady Gaga, actress Kate Bosworth and singer Dua Lipa. The increasing importance of London Fashion Week reflects Britain's booming fashion industry, with revenues for women's ready-to-wear rising by 5.5 per cent to £30.9 billion (\$54.1 billion) last year, according to market analyst group Mintel. AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE



(Above) Roksan lincic's long, fluid dresses nonchalantly tied at the waist or shoulder evoked the style of the Roman toga.
(Left) A mixture of leather and studding defined JW Anderson's autumn/winter 2019 collection. PHOTOS: REUTERS, AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE



Welcome To The Machine comprise (from left) Yuk Wong, Lim Kiang, Laurence Bucci, Arindam Chatterjee, Noel Ong and David Baptista. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

Home-grown take on a Pink Floyd show

Tribute band Welcome To The Machine will stage their version of a live performance by the British band

Eddino Abdul Hadi
Music Correspondent

Iconic British rock band Pink Floyd have a reputation for staging aurally and visually brilliant live concerts.

While fans are not likely to see the now-defunct band play in Singapore, a home-grown tribute band are planning to create their version of a live Pink Floyd show.

Welcome To The Machine, who pride themselves as South-east Asia's only Pink Floyd tribute band, will be staging a full-length, solo concert at The Pavilion at Far East

Square on Saturday – a rare move for a home-grown cover band.

They will play all the songs from two seminal Pink Floyd albums from the 1970s, *The Dark Side Of The Moon* (1973) and its follow-up, *Wish You Were Here* (1975).

While the tribute band have performed many shows at clubs and festivals in Singapore, as well as in countries such as Vietnam and Thailand, since they formed in 2012, the upcoming concert will be their first self-organised show.

In an attempt to make the experience as close as they can to a real Pink Floyd show, the band are working with design and production companies Mi5chief Makers and Dreadnought Lighting.

The concert will feature a multi-level stage, laser lighting and video projections.

Guitarist and co-founder Noel Ong, 46, describes Pink Floyd's live shows as "mind-blowing" and watching ex-Pink Floyd member Roger Waters play a similar show in Sydney last year with his fellow

musicians inspired them to try and recreate "their own tiny version" of the concert.

Besides Ong, who plays the guitar in funk rock band Ugly In The Morning, the musicians who make up Welcome To The Machine come from various eras of bands here.

The oldest member of the band, bass player and co-founder Lim Kiang, 69, is best known as a member of pioneering 1960s R&B and blues band Straydogs.

Guitarist and keyboardist David Baptista, 48, plays in Ugly In The Morning and progressive rock band Forbidden Planet, who also include drummer Laurence Bucci, 44.

Keyboard player Yuk Wong, 30, is also part of percussive rock band Wicked Aura, while singer Arindam Chatterjee, 44, has fronted bands such as The Lunchboxes.

Their individual music tastes might differ, but as Baptista puts it: "Pink Floyd are one band who are present in all our album collections. There is a certain type of complexity to the songs."

The band, who have performed in festivals here such as Beerfest Asia last year and nightspots such as Barbershop by Timbre, have also recruited sessionists to beef up their ranks, including a saxophone player and two backing singers.

The upcoming show is proving to be a draw among live music fans. It was initially planned to take place at Kallang venue The Lab, but all tickets were quickly sold out.

To accommodate a larger audience, the band decided to move to the bigger The Pavilion. Tickets were still available at press time.

The band intend to take their performance to more Pink Floyd fans overseas and are planning a tour of Australia in the future.

Bucci says: "Pink Floyd have a cult following. You can't not respect the music. You have to show some kind of love and attention to the songs. You have to be obsessed with their music."

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The World Restaurant Awards

South Africa's Wolfgat is Restaurant of the Year

Eunice Quek
Food Correspondent

A Japanese offshoot of Noma, a Bangkok fine-dining restaurant and a South African ocean-side cottage eatery were among the winners of the inaugural The World Restaurant Awards announced on Monday.

South Africa's Wolfgat – which specialises in local seafood and plants foraged from the Western Cape – won the highest honour of Restaurant of the Year, as well as the accolade of Off-Map Destination.

Tokyo's Inua, which opened in June last year, was named Arrival of the Year, while Bangkok's Bo.Lan won the Tweezer-Free Kitchen award for its more "hands-on" style of plating.

Other more tongue-in-cheek awards went to French chefs Alain Ducasse, who received the Tattoo-Free Chef honour; and Alain Passard for the Instagram Account award.

Le Clarence restaurant in Paris

won for Original Thinking, while Lyon's 98-year-old restaurant La Mere Brazier was lauded as an Enduring Classic.

In its bid to be more comprehensive and diverse, the inaugural awards showcased winners in 18 categories across 10 countries.

The awards are produced by IMG – an events, media, fashion and sports company which operates in more than 30 countries – in partnership with restaurant journalist Joe Warwick and food writer and broadcaster Andrea Petrini.

Two Singapore eateries were longlisted for the awards, but not shortlisted.

Sungei Road Laksa in Jalan Berseh was nominated in the House Special category for establishments defined by a particular dish, while one-Michelin-star modern Australian barbecue restaurant Burnt Ends in Teck Lim Road received two nominations – for No Reservations Required (for restaurants that accept walk-in diners) and Tweezer-free Kitchen.

The winners were decided by a panel of 100 judges from 37 coun-

tries, who include chefs, restaurateurs, journalists and film-makers.

High-profile names included Danish chef Rene Redzepi of Noma in Denmark; Italian chef Massimo Bottura of Osteria Francescana in Modena, Italy; American restaurateur David Chang of the Momofuku restaurant group, with restaurants across the United States, Canada and Australia; and Canada-born chef May Chow of Little Bao in Hong Kong.

Representing Singapore on the panel was Japanese food journalist Kyoko Nakayama, who has been based here for five years.

She writes for local publications such as Tatler Dining by Singapore Tatler and is also a columnist with Forbes Japan.

Ms Cecile Rebbot, director of The World Restaurant Awards from IMG, said: "We are proud to have given a global stage to a diverse spectrum of incredibly deserving restaurants, teams, experiences and initiatives."

"We set out to create a truly international awards with a fresh approach, recognising the full

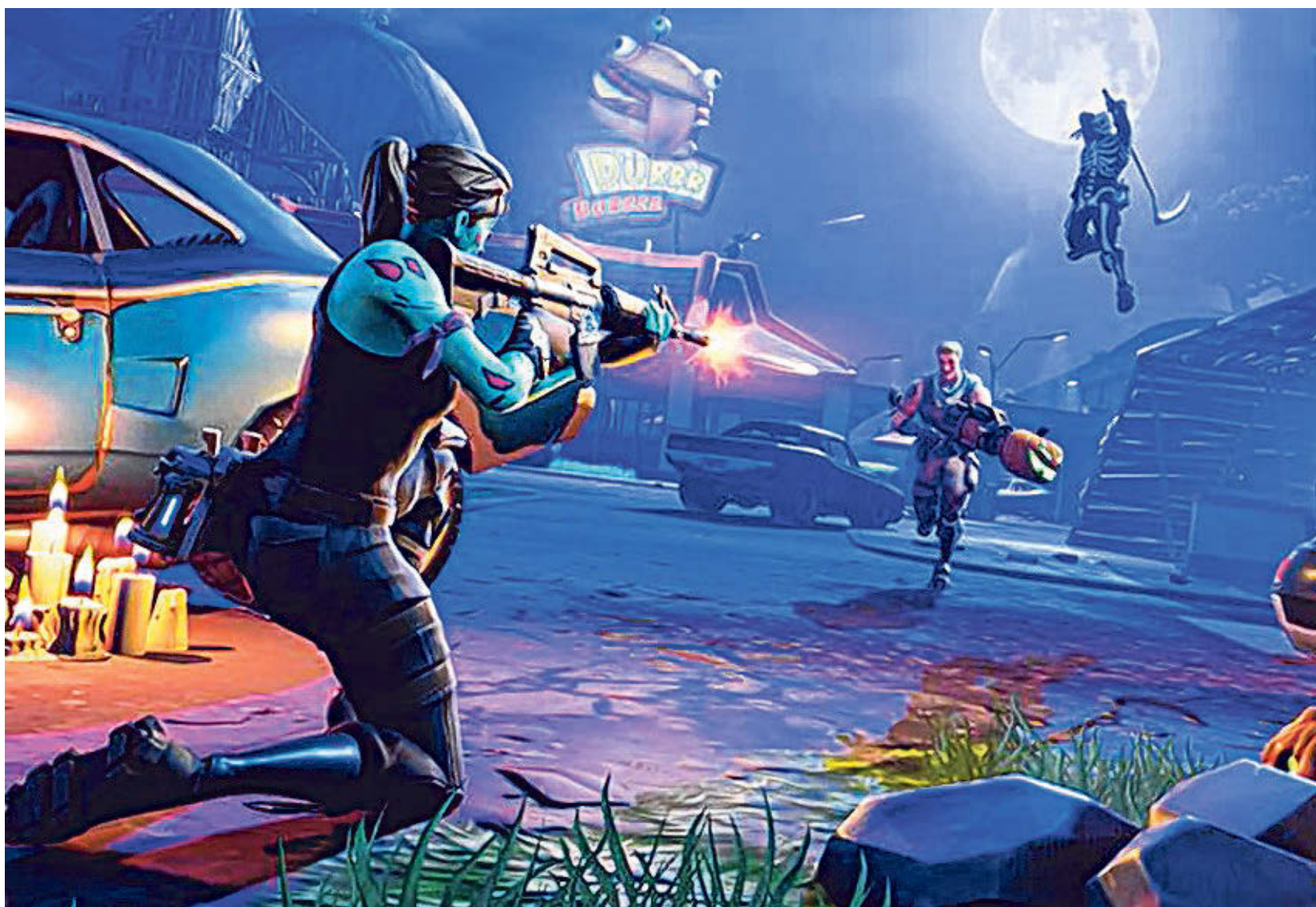


Kobus van der Merwe is the chef of Wolfgat, which specialises in local seafood and plants foraged from the Western Cape. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

breadth and depth of the industry, but this is only the beginning in terms of the restaurant experiences around the world that we want to explore and discover."

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• For the full list of awards, go to <https://restaurantawards.world>



Fortnite is a competitive shooter that is free to download. PHOTO: EPIC GAMES

Fortnite deals a blow to its competitors

The free-to-play battle royale game is threatening traditional game-makers

WASHINGTON • The wild success of Fortnite – Epic Games' free-to-play battle royale game – has rattled the gaming industry, proving how a business model that does not require the purchase of a big-budget title can attract a massive audience and keep players coming back.

While industry analysts are unsure whether Fortnite and games like it will permanently boost the overall pool of gamers or merely siphon off players from other titles, its staggering achievement poses a challenge to incumbent, traditional game-makers.

Last week, one of the industry's biggest gaming companies, Activision Blizzard, announced it is laying off nearly 800 workers, as the company forecasts a drop of nearly 20 per cent in revenue this year.

Despite posting the best financial results in the company's history, Activision Blizzard said it failed to meet its "full potential".

Executives cited weaker-than-expected demand and an inability to boost in-game purchases.

The company is grappling with multiple issues and Fortnite has had an impact on them, said Mr Scott Kessler, an analyst with CFRA.

He said: "People have only so much time in the day and so much money to spend."

"One thing is obvious: Legacy gaming companies have had a hard time introducing games that have substantial and sustainable development."

In a statement to The Washington Post, Activision Blizzard, which makes Call Of Duty, Overwatch and Hearthstone, said it is boosting the number of developers working on key titles by 20 per cent, returning to "the franchise focus that has fuelled our long-term success".

While the rise of Fortnite, at least in the short term, has translated to less time and money spent by some gamers on other titles, the broader impact of the game rests in its business model, said Mr Michael Pachter, an analyst at Wedbush.

He said people are spending less time on popular games, such as Call Of Duty and Electronic Arts' Battlefield, reflecting Fortnite's immediate impact and market-share cannibalisation.

However, Mr Pachter added that Fortnite has also attracted new gamers who are younger and more diverse, paving the way for future

free-to-play titles that do not rely on the traditional US\$60 (S\$81) retail purchase of a new game.

"Is the Fortnite business model a threat to Activision Blizzard and others? The answer is yes," Mr Pachter said.

Just days before Activision Blizzard disclosed the layoffs, Electronic Arts, another major American game-maker, announced that its free-to-play battle royale game, Apex Legends, had gained an astonishing following of 25 million players only a week after its release.

Apex Legends drew 10 million gamers after just three days, Electronics Arts said, racking up new players at a record pace. It took Fortnite two weeks to achieve that benchmark.

Similar to Fortnite, Apex Legends is a competitive shooter that is free to download. The game features characters that have special abilities and forces players closer together as time elapses during a match, escalating the chances of confrontation.

One added twist is that, unlike Fortnite, characters can be resurrected after they are killed, allowing players to stay in the action throughout a match.

The game's developer, Respawn, is also banking on prominent video-game streamers to elevate Apex Legends' popularity.

In partnership with Twitch, a live-streaming platform with a mas-

sive gaming audience, Respawn has announced a tournament in Europe and North America, with prizes totalling US\$200,000.

Mr Pachter highlighted other ways Electronic Arts and Apex Legends are taking cues from Fortnite, pointing to money-making add-ons such as selling access to character outfits and customised weapons and offering paid passes that let players unlock additional in-game items.

"They are copying them every step of the way and it's brilliant," he said. "Emulation is the sincerest form of flattery."

Mr Timothy O'Shea, an analyst at Jefferies, said the biggest gaming trend this year will be the acceleration of the free-to-play model.

"It becomes a lot harder if you're Activision to pony up and pay US\$60 for Call Of Duty when other people are offering quality games for free," he said. "This is the final evolution of a 10-year trend transition away from these retail models selling a disc at GameStop."

While the free-to-play model might not work for every genre of video game or for every game-maker, publishers and developers who abstain may be at risk if the market tips further towards these big, free, multi-player titles, Mr O'Shea said.

"Make no mistake. The biggest games in the world will continue to be free," he said. WASHINGTON POST

Netflix wants an Oscar win and it is spending big

LOS ANGELES • Netflix called it Roma Experience Day.

On a Sunday last December, the streaming giant rented two soundstages on a historic movie lot in Hollywood to evangelise for Roma, director Alfonso Cuarón's art film about a domestic worker in Mexico.

Oscar voters perused a museum-style exhibit of Roma costumes. Cuarón and his crew sat for hours of panel discussions.

Breakfast? Lunch? Provided. There were Roma stickers and Roma-stamped chocolates. Attendees were even superimposed into a Roma scene to share online.

All of it struck some voters as over the top. It was certainly a display of just how badly Netflix wants an Oscar – and how much faith it has put in the person behind the event, a strategist named Lisa Taback, to get it done.

Ms Taback, 55, is an Oscar-campaign veteran who cut her teeth at Miramax with Harvey Weinstein in the 1990s and whose resume includes best-picture winners such as The King's Speech (2010), The Artist (2011) and Spotlight (2015).

Mr Ted Sarandos, Netflix's chief content officer, called Ms Taback "the best of the best" when he named her vice-president for talent relations and awards in July, adding that he wanted to "expand and deepen our efforts to celebrate the incredible creators and talent who bring their dream projects to Netflix".

The hiring went off like a sonic boom in Hollywood, reverberating to the highest levels of rival studios.

The Hollywood Reporter headline read: "Awards landscape rocked as Netflix poaches leading strategist." The streaming giant had aided its own awards operation while dealing a blow to competitors by taking a top campaigner off the market.

Now, the costly Oscar push that Ms Taback has orchestrated for Roma is starting to look historic. Cuarón's film, shot in Spanish and Mixtec and deemed a masterpiece by many critics, heads into the 91st Academy Awards on Sunday as a strong contender to win the Oscar for Best Picture.

If Netflix notches its first such triumph, "the game changes forever," said Dr Marty Kaplan, the Norman Lear professor of entertainment, media and society at the University of Southern California.

If a film primarily distributed online wins, the debate in Hollywood about what constitutes cinema is over. It would strike a blow to the big multiplex chains, which have refused to show Roma because Netflix offered them an exclusive play period of only three weeks; three months is the norm.

As far as box-office figures go, the streaming service has said the film has appeared in about 250 theatres in the United States since it was released on Nov 21, but it refuses to disclose ticket sales. A win by Roma could embolden old-line studios such as Universal and Warner Bros to shorten their theatrical "windows".

Winning would also make it easier for Netflix to compete with traditional studios for top film-makers. Its lone Oscar for a feature-length film to date has been for Icarus for Best Documentary last year.

Even victories in lesser categories – Roma has 10 nominations in total and The Ballad Of Buster Scruggs earned three more – would buoy the Netflix brand, giving the company a glow of excellence and helping it defend against a coming onslaught of competitors.

Disney, WarnerMedia and Apple are all introducing megawatt streaming services this year.

Ms Taback declined to comment for this article. Strategists like Ms Taback try to avoid the media spotlight, especially before the Oscars, contending that they do not want to take attention away from the films. Another reason, of course, is that no studio wants to look like it is trying to manipulate voters.

With so much at stake, Netflix has empowered Ms Taback and her colleagues in the company's publicity department to mount a big, bombastic, back-up-the-Brink's-trucks campaign.

Roma, a black-and-white period film with no known stars, cost US\$15 million (S\$20.4 million) to make, but the company has spent an estimated US\$25 million to US\$30 million on promotion.

Some rival companies, yowling behind the scenes about overspending by Netflix, insist those figures are conservative. Netflix insiders have howled back, saying that some of its spending has been to advertise Roma to consumers.

Whatever the cost, the campaign is easily the most lavish in history for a foreign-language film. No foreign film has won Best Picture. NYTIMES

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7.00 First Look Asia (Simulcast From CNA) (CA)
9.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (HD) (PG) (IE)
10.00 The \$100,000 Pyramid 2 (HD) (V)
10.30 Everyday Gourmet 3 (HD) (IE)
11.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V) **PM**
12.00 Martha Bakes 7 (HD) (IE)
12.30 Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course (IE)
1.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (CC) (V)
1.30 Kin (PG) (CC) (V)
2.00 Phua Chu Kang Pte Ltd 4 (SC)
2.30 Arts 21 (HD) (Cul)
3.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (HD) (PG) (IE)
4.00 Rojak (PG) (SC)
4.30 Survivor 37 (PG) (V)
5.30 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
6.30 The \$100,000 Pyramid 2 (V)
7.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (HD) (CC) (V)
7.30 America's Got Talent: The Champions (V)
8.30 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 News 5 (HD)
9.30 Vanishing Foods (HD) (IE)
10.00 Becoming Singapore (CC) (IE)
11.00 Scorpion 2 (HD) (PG) (D) **AM**
12.00 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
12.30 Lion Moms (PG) (D)
1.30 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
2.20 Hawaii Five-0 7 (PG13) (D)
3.10 Lethal Weapon (PG) (D)
4.10 Martha Bakes 7 (IE)
4.40 Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course (IE)
5.10 The Dr Oz Show 10 (PG) (IE)

CHANNEL 8

AM
6.00 Ah Ma Can Cook (V)
7.00 The Best Of Food Source 3 (V)
7.30 Hello Singapore Highlights (HD) (News)
8.00 Walk With Me (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Morning Express (HD) (News)
9.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)

10.00 Stay Healthy Stay Happy 2017 (IE)
10.30 Night Market Life Aka Life (PG) (D) **PM**
12.30 Street Smart 2 (V)
1.00 News 8 At One (HD)
1.30 118 (PG) (CC) (D)
2.00 New Doraemon (S)
2.30 The Precedents (PG) (D)
3.30 The Golden Path (CC) (D)
4.30 Taste Of Life (PG) (D)
5.30 When Duty Calls (PG) (CC) (D)
6.30 Hello Singapore (HD) (News)
7.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 A Sweet Taste Of Art (CC) (IE)
9.00 Walk With Me (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 News Tonight (HD)
10.30 Garden Of Treasures 3 (CC) (IE)
11.00 Princess Agents (PG) (D) **AM**
12.00 The Princess Weiyoung (PG) (D)
1.00 Days Of Disaster (PG) (IE)
2.00 Fiery Passion (D)
4.00 A Place Called Home (PG) (D)

CHANNEL U

PM
3.00 Scrum! (PG) (CC) (D)
4.00 Guess Who 5 (IE)
5.00 Cheongdamdong Scandal (PG) (CC) (D)
6.00 The Girl Who Sees Smells (PG) (CC) (D)
7.00 My Father Is Strange (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Schools Unlimited (CC) (IE)
10.00 Brother's Keeper 2 (PG13) (CC) (D)
11.00 News Tonight
11.30 Schools Unlimited (CC) (IE) **AM**
12.30 My Father Is Strange (PG) (CC) (D)
2.30 Close

CNA

AM
6.00 Singapore Tonight
7.00 First Look Asia
9.00 Asia Business First
10.02 Ask The Finance Minister 2019
11.00 News Now **PM**
1.02 When We Play
2.00 News Now
4.02 Market Insights: 2019's Multi-faceted Investment Landscape
4.30 This Weekend

5.00 News Now
7.02 Ask The Finance Minister 2019
8.00 Primetime Asia
9.02 Champions For Change (CC)
10.00 Singapore Tonight
11.02 When We Play **AM**
12.00 News Now
12.30 Indonesia's Game Changers
1.02 Ask The Finance Minister 2019
2.00 News Now
2.30 Asia Exposed
3.02 Undercover Asia 6
4.00 News Now
4.30 Indonesia's Game Changers
5.02 Champions For Change
Programmes may be pre-empted by breaking news

VASANTHAM

PM
3.00 Super Samayal 4 (IE)
3.30 Anjaraipetti 5 (IE)
4.00 Priyasakhi (D)
4.30 Vasantham Express (IE)
5.30 Mighty Raju Animation Series (S)
6.00 Ishq Ka Rang Safed (Hindi) (PG) (D)
7.00 Konjam Soru Konjam Varalaru (PG) (Cul)
7.30 Mella Thiranthathu Kathavu 3 (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Uyire (PG) (CC) (D)
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)
9.00 Ethiroli 15 (HD) (CC) (CA)
9.30 Theerpugal 4 (CC) (IE)
10.00 Rowthiram (PG13) (D)
10.30 Nijangal (PG) (CC) (D)
11.00 Maalai Maalai Vasantham (V)
11.30 Tamil Seithi (Encore) (News) **AM**
12.00 Close

OKTO

AM
9.00 Justin Time (P)
9.30 Teddies (P)
10.00 Guess How Much I Love You (P)
10.30 Sesame Street (HD) (P)
11.00 Mouk (P)
11.30 Ready Jet Go! (P) **PM**
12.00 Hiccup & Sneeze (P)
12.30 Teddies (HD) (IE)

1.00 Rob The Robot (P)
1.30 Justin Time (P)
2.00 Guess How Much I Love You (P)
2.30 Sesame Street (HD) (P)
3.00 Mouk (P)
3.30 Ready Jet Go! (P)
4.00 Odd Squad (S)
4.30 Shutterbugs (S)
5.00 Littlest Pet Shop (S)
5.30 Marcus Level (S)
6.00 The New Powerpuff Girls (S)
6.30 Before I Was Awesome (S)
7.00 My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic (CC) (S)
7.30 Miraculous: Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir (CC) (S)
8.00 Turning Mecard (S)
8.30 Inazuma Eleven (HD) (CC) (S)
9.00 ATP 250: New York Open (Sports) (Delayed)
11.00 Battle Of The Network Stars (Sports) **AM**
12.00 Close

SURIA

PM
3.00 Juxbox Ekspres
4.00 Bibik-Bibikku (PG) (D)
5.00 Rapuh (PG) (CC) (D)
6.00 Oh My Family (S) (D)
6.30 Top 5 Makan (CC) (IE)
7.00 Makmum Yang Paling Aku Cinta (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Berita (HD) (News)
8.30 Detik (PG) (CA)
9.00 Alah Abang, Amboi Kakak (PG) (CC) (IE) (Debut)
9.30 Hilang Kasih Di Sarajevo (CC) (D)
10.30 Bingit (PG) (D)
11.30 Berita (HD) (News) (R) **AM**
12.00 Close

C: Children; CA: Current Affairs;
CC: Closed Captions; Cul: Culture;
D: Drama; IE: Info-Ed; M: Movies;
P: Preschool; PG: Parental Guidance;
R: Repeat; S: Schoolkids; SC: Sitcom;
V: Variety

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to www.starhub.com/tv or www.singtelv.com.sg

TheStarsSay

Aries (March 21 - April 19)

Take a positive step towards better health – you know what you need to do.

Taurus (April 20 - May 20)

Make sure you are letting the right people know what is going on.

Gemini (May 21 - June 20)

Life is good, but you need to make sure you are using your brain.

Cancer (June 21 - July 22)

Your mental energy is right for retaining information, so it is a good time to make plans.

Leo (July 23 - Aug 22)

Your thinking is clearer than usual – you should take care of your finances.

Virgo (Aug 23 - Sept 22)

Your mental energy helps you make sense of a mystery that has been bugging you.

Libra (Sept 23 - Oct 22)

Things are not quite right until you remember what is going on. Try and figure out what you have forgotten.

Scorpio (Oct 23 - Nov 21)

It is the small stuff that matters, so get everything lined up and ready for something big.

Sagittarius (Nov 22 - Dec 21)

You are having a hard time dealing with the boss – do not antagonise him.

Capricorn (Dec 22 - Jan 19)

You need to deal with a lot of work, but you have so much energy that everything should turn out fine.

Aquarius (Jan 20 - Feb 18)

You feel more emotionally stable right now – reach out to a family member.

Pisces (Feb 19 - March 20)

You do not need a plan to make the most of your energy – get where you need to go.

• Provided by Astrology.com (www.astrology.com)

Radio

KISS92

AM
6.00 Maddy, Jason & Arnold In The Morning
10.00 Weekdays With Carol Smith **PM**
1.00 Weekdays With Charmaine Yee
4.00 On The Drive Home With Shan Wee
8.00 Josh's Goodnight Kiss

ONE FM 91.3

AM
6.00 Glenn & The Flying Dutchman
10.00 The Midday Brew With Charmaine Phua **PM**
1.00 Afternoon Tune Up With Cheryl Miles
4.00 The Weekday Getaway With Divian Nair
8.00 Love Songs With Simon Lim

MONEY FM 89.3

AM
6.00 The Breakfast Huddle With Elliott Danker & Finance Presenter Ryan Huang
10.00 Midday With Howie Lim **PM**
2.00 Prime Time With Claressa Monteiro
4.00 The Curve With Michelle Martin & Bernard Lim

UFM100.3

AM
6.00 UFM100.3 Mornings With Wenhong, Limei & Xiaozhu
10.00 Lively Life With Kemlin **PM**
1.00 Tea With Yuling
4.00 Sing-a-long With Xinying & Weilong
8.00 Feel The Night With Chengyao

96.3 HAO FM

AM
6.00 Morning Drive Time With Jing Yun, De Ming And Jie Qi
10.00 Lunch Break With Anna **PM**
1.00 Automation
4.00 Evening Drive Time With Li Yi And Guo Xian
8.00 Night Time With Wei Wen

Tides

SUN RISE/SET TIME: 7.17am/7.21pm
MOON RISE/SET TIME: 8.10pm/7.42am

TIDES TODAY: Singapore: 12.03am (2.9m), 5.28am (1.3m), 11.18am (3.3m), 6pm (0.2m), Desaru: 5.07am (1.6m), 10.30am (2.8m), 5.13pm (0.5m), Port Dickson: 1.53am (0m), 7.17am (2.8m), 2.31pm (0.2m), 7.53pm (2.8m), Mersing: 5.04am (1.7m), 9.58am (2.6m), 4.40pm (0.5m), 11.39pm (3.4m).

TIDES TOMORROW: Singapore: 12.37am (3m), 6.15am (1.1m), 12.03pm (3.4m), 6.50pm (0.2m), Desaru: 12.15am (2.9m), 5.46am (1.5m), 11.26am (2.8m), 6pm (0.5m), Port Dickson: 2.45am (0m), 7.58am (2.8m), 3.09pm (0.1m), 8.32pm (2.9m), Mersing: 5.45am (1.6m), 10.57am (2.7m), 5.27pm (0.6m).

For updates and more details, call Meteorological Service Singapore, NEA, on 6542-7788 or go to www.nea.gov.sg

StarHub TV

HISTORY (CHANNEL 401)

AM
9.30 Mountain Men 6
10.25 Forged In Fire 4
11.20 Storage Wars 11
11.45 Storage Wars: Texas 5 **PM**
12.15 The Curse Of Oak Island 4
1.10 America's War On Drugs
3.00 Storage Wars 11
3.55 Storage Wars: Texas 5
4.25 Forged In Fire 4
5.20 Mountain Men 6
6.15 Swamp People 8
7.10 Pawn Stars 18
8.05 History Drama: Project Blue Book
9.00 Ancient Aliens 10
9.55 History Drama: Project Blue Book
10.50 America's War On Drugs

LIFETIME (CHANNEL 514)

AM
9.00 Gok's Fill Your House For Free
10.00 Glam Masters
11.00 Up! Pretty **PM**
12.00 Dance Moms 7
1.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
2.00 High School Lover
3.35 Love At First Flight
4.30 Who Runs The World With Mongchin
5.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
6.00 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown 2
7.00 Little Women LA: Terra's Little Family
7.30 Married At First Sight Australia 4
9.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
10.00 No One Would Tell
11.35 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown 2

HBO (CHANNEL 601)

AM
9.35 Modern Life Is Rubbish (PG)
11.15 Rampage (NC16) **PM**
1.00 The Fountain (NC16)
2.40 Megamind (PG)
4.15 The Parent Trap (PG)
6.20 Race To Witch Mountain (PG)
8.00 Master Of The White Crane Fist: Wong Yan-Lam (NC16)
9.30 Dunkirk (PG)
11.15 True Detective 3 (NC16) **AM**
12.15 Molly's Game (NC16)
2.30 Backstabbing For Beginners (NC16)
4.15 Fire Down Below (PG)

CINEMAX (CHANNEL 611)

AM
9.50 You Don't Know Jack (NC16) **PM**
12.05 Darklight
1.35 Bugs (NC16)
3.00 Control Factor
4.30 Changing Lanes

6.10 Mighty Joe Young (PG)
8.05 The Saint
10.00 Scream 3 (M18)
11.55 From Dusk Till Dawn 2: Texas Blood Money (M18) **AM**
1.25 The Negotiator

HUB E CITY (CHANNEL 825)

AM
9.15 Dowry (HD)
10.15 Viva La Romance (HD) **PM**
12.15 Still Loving You (HD)
1.30 Signal (HD)
2.45 The King Vs The King 2 (HD)
4.15 Go As Far As You Can (HD)
4.45 Still Loving You (HD)
6.00 Dowry (HD)
7.00 Hot Door Night 16 (HD)
8.00 Chinese Restaurant 2 (HD)
10.00 Noble Aspirations (HD)
11.00 Hot Door Night 16 (HD)

HUB SPORTS 1 (CHANNEL 201)

AM
9.30 Tennis: ATP World Tour Uncovered
10.00 Spirit Of Yachting: 2018
10.30 Horse Racing: FEI Equestrian World
11.00 Snooker: The Masters Highlights – Semi-finals **PM**
2.30 Spirit Of Yachting: 2018
3.00 Mountain Bike: Crankworx World Tour 2018 Innsbruck Highlights
4.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World
5.00 Tennis: Deuce
5.30 Tennis: ATP Champions Tour 2018
6.00 Tennis: ATP 500 Rio Open Presented By Claro **AM**
12.00 Snooker: 2018 UK Championship Highlights – Semi-finals

HUB SPORTS 2 (CHANNEL 202)

AM
9.00 Wrestling: WWE Smackdown (PG) (Live)
11.00 Magazine: National Icon
11.30 Football: The EFL Highlights **PM**
12.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
12.30 Asean Basketball League: Zhuhai Wolf Warriors Vs San Miguel Alab Pilipinas
2.30 Football: EFL Championships 2018 Matchday 33: Aston Villa Vs West Bromwich Albion
4.30 Wrestling: WWE This Week (PG)
5.00 The Football Review
5.30 Asean Basketball League: CLS Knights Indonesia Vs Mono Vampire
7.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
8.00 Wrestling: WWE Raw (PG13)
10.30 Football: The EFL Highlights
11.00 Football: Ladbrokes Scottish Premiership Highlights
11.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV **AM**
12.00 Wrestling: WWE This Week (PG)

Singtel TV

CARTOON NETWORK (CHANNEL 226)

AM
6.00 Oggy & The Cockroaches
7.00 The Tom And Jerry Show
8.00 Teen Titans Go!
9.00 Grizzy And The Lemmings
9.30 The Tom And Jerry Show
10.00 We Bare Bears
10.30 Supernooobs
11.00 The Powerpuff Girls **PM**
12.00 Teen Titans Go!
1.00 We Bare Bears
2.00 Ninjago: Masters Of Spinjitzu
2.30 Craig Of The Creek
3.00 Rat-A-Tat
3.30 The Amazing World Of Gumball
4.00 We Bare Bears
4.30 The Powerpuff Girls
5.00 Teen Titans Go!
5.30 Craig Of The Creek
6.00 Ben 10 Challenge
6.30 Oggy & The Cockroaches
7.00 The Tom And Jerry Show
7.30 Grizzy And The Lemmings
7.55 The Heroic Quest Of The Valiant Prince Ivandoe
8.00 We Bare Bears
9.00 The Powerpuff Girls
10.00 Regular Show
10.30 Steven Universe
11.00 Clarence
11.30 Adventure Time

AXN (HD) (CHANNEL 304)

AM
6.00 Hawaii Five-0 7
6.50 Seal Team
7.40 American Ninja Warrior 7
9.25 Hawaii Five-0 7
10.20 Seal Team
11.10 The Amazing Race 30 **PM**
1.00 Criminal Minds: Suspect Behavior
1.55 American Ninja Warrior 7
2.50 Hawaii Five-0 7
3.45 Seal Team
4.35 The Amazing Race 30
6.25 The Blacklist 6
7.15 Criminal Minds: Beyond Borders 2
8.10 NCIS: Los Angeles 8
10.00 Seal Team 2
10.55 Supernatural 14
11.50 NCIS: Los Angeles 8

WARNER TV (HD) (CHANNEL 306)

AM
6.00 Blindspot 3
6.50 Major Crimes 5
7.40 DC's Legends Of Tomorrow 3
8.30 Person Of Interest 4
9.20 The Flash 4
10.10 Blindspot 3
11.00 Almost Genius
11.50 Blended **PM**
1.55 Friends 10
2.20 Blindspot 3

3.10 Almost Genius
4.00 The Flash 4
4.50 Person Of Interest 4
5.40 Major Crimes 5
6.30 The Flash 4
7.20 The Big Bang Theory 11
7.45 Friends 10
8.10 Almost Genius
9.00 Lethal Weapon 3
9.50 Race To The Scene
10.40 The Big Bang Theory 11
11.05 Friends 10
11.30 Lethal Weapon 3

COMEDY CENTRAL ASIA (HD) (CHANNEL 324)

AM
6.00 At Midnight With Chris Hardwick 2
6.25 The Daily Show 24
6.55 Just For Laughs Gags 14
7.20 Mr Bean
7.50 Most Ridiculous 2
8.15 Amazingness
8.40 Mr Bean
9.10 Caraoke Showdown
9.35 Just For Laughs Gags 14
10.00 Hot In Cleveland 2
10.50 Mr Bean
11.20 Saturday Night Live 43 **PM**
12.05 The Daily Show 24
12.30 All Access: Sugar Sammy
1.15 The Comedy Jam
2.05 Saturday Night Live 43
2.50 Dr Ken
3.15 Just Another Immigrant: Romesh Ranganathan
3.45 Ronny Chieng: International Student
4.15 Just For Laughs Gags 14
4.40 Comedy Central Roast Of Bruce Willis
6.10 The Daily Show 24
6.35 Above Average Presents
6.40 Your Face Or Mine 3
7.10 Amazingness
7.35 Above Average Presents
7.40 Billy On The Street 4
8.00 Most Ridiculous 2
8.50 The Goldbergs 5
9.40 Hot In Cleveland 6
10.30 Inside Amy Schumer
10.55 Above Average Presents
11.00 The Jim Jefferies Show
11.25 Above Average Presents
11.30 The Daily Show 24

JIA LE (HD) (CHANNEL 502)

AM
6.00 Taste Of Love
7.00 First Love
8.00 King Of Blaze
9.00 Eagle And Youngster
10.00 100% Wife **PM**
12.10 First Love
1.00 In The Name Of Love
2.00 100% Wife
4.10 King Of Blaze
5.00 First Love
6.00 In The Name Of Love
7.10 100% Wife
9.10 The Destiny Of White Snake
10.00 King Of Blaze
11.00 Eagles And Youngster

Queen to play at Oscars

LOS ANGELES • “Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?” the Oscars organisers said, tapping the opening lines of 1975 Queen song *Bohemian Rhapsody* to announce their coup on Monday.

“We welcome #QueenWillRock and @adamlambert to this year’s Oscars,” the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences added in tweeting its link-up with the British rockers to perform in Sunday’s ceremony.

Blockbuster *Bohemian Rhapsody* is up for Best Movie.

The band, whose late frontman Freddie Mercury is the subject of the film, are now made up of original members Brian May and Roger Taylor, with former *American Idol* star Lambert taking on vocals.

“Queen and @adamlambert will rock you,” the band tweeted in response.

Bohemian Rhapsody has five Academy Award nominations, in-

cluding a Best Actor nod for Rami Malek, who portrays Mercury in the film. Mercury died of Aids in London in 1991 at age 45.

The movie has taken more than US\$854 million (S\$1.16 billion) at the global box office to become the most successful musical biopic.

The academy did not say what songs Queen would perform or when they would appear on stage during the telecast, which is going ahead without a host for the first time in 30 years.

Bohemian Rhapsody is not nominated for its songs or soundtrack.

Other musical performances on Sunday will include Lady Gaga and actor-director Bradley Cooper singing their Oscar-nominated song *Shallow* from movie *A Star Is Born*.

Bette Midler will sing Best Original Song contender *The Place Where Lost Things Go* from the film *Mary Poppins Returns*. REUTERS



Queen's Brian May (far left) and Roger Taylor (left), seen here with *Bohemian Rhapsody* star Rami Malek in California last month, will perform at the Oscars ceremony on Sunday with former *American Idol* star Adam Lambert (above) on vocals. PHOTO: REUTERS



Is Gaga having a Bad Romance?

NEW YORK • Has Lady Gaga ditched fiancé Christian Carino?

Call it shallow speculation, but many netizens noted that he was a no-show at the recent Grammy Awards, where she won three prizes, including for Best Pop Duo/Group Performance, for *Shallow* from the movie *A Star Is Born*.

Nor did the 32-year-old wear her US\$400,000 (S\$543,000) engagement ring.

Fans are adamant that the *Bad Romance* singer had reason to feel cheated by a loved one.

A report in the Radar portal said Mr Carino, 50, a talent agent who represents the singer, had dinner with a brunette two days before the Grammy Awards.

“They were holding hands and it looked like a romantic date,” a source said.

Gaga further cemented talk of a rift when she posted photographs of her new tattoos on Valentine’s Day, instead of images with him.

The couple announced their engagement four months ago.

Gaga is also said to have unfollowed Mr Carino on Instagram.

All eyes will now switch to the Oscars ceremony on Sunday, where she is up for Best Actress for her performance in *A Star Is Born*.

Will the couple walk the red carpet together, or will the Paparazzi singer brave the media scrum alone?

Actress-singer Lady Gaga, seen here with her fiancé Christian Carino at the Screen Actors Guild Awards last month, was recently spotted without her engagement ring. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

On social media



STAR EMPLOYER: Hong Kong actor Tony Leung Ka Fai (left), 61, has shown that he is a very caring boss.

When Delia (centre), his family maid, was diagnosed with cervical cancer in November, he made sure he drove her to the hospital for treatments, including chemotherapy, every day. She has since recovered.

The details were revealed by his daughter Nikkie, 27, who wrote online: “My rock, my family, my dad’s best friend, my beautiful jie jie Delia is officially cancer-free.

“After months of going to the hospital every day, diet change (keto diet), chemo (once a week), radiation (five days a week), internal radiation (four times under full anaesthesia)... bye bye cervical cancer.

“Jie jie, you are one of the strongest women I know. Through everything, you’ve been so strong, so positive, cheering everyone up.

“Early mornings at the hospital, even on Christmas Day, New Year’s, your birthday... You never gave up, still with a big, big smile. I love you so much.”

Nikkie also paid tribute to her father, who is married to actress Jiang Jia Nian (right), writing: “Thank you to my parents for driving us to the hospital every day, going to doctor’s appointments and waiting on chemo days to make sure everything goes smoothly.”

She also thanked the “staff at Queen Mary Hospital for their hard work and support”.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/NIKKIECHLEUNG

Brothers say Empire actor staged attack



LOS ANGELES • Two brothers have told policemen that they rehearsed an “attack” on gay *Empire* actor Jussie Smollett (left) before the incident occurred.

According to sources cited by gossip portal TMZ, Smollett had chosen the place – outside his Chicago apartment – for the “assault” and had told the brothers not to rough him up too much.

Smollett, 36, reported to the police on Jan 29 that two men had yelled racial and homophobic slurs, hit him, poured bleach on him and tied a rope around his neck while he walked downtown in Chicago.

The police have since said that their investigation had “shifted” after talking to the alleged attackers, who were released, and that they intend to conduct a follow-up interview with the actor.

ABC News reported that Smollett had staged the attack, paying the two men, because he was upset that a threatening letter he had received earlier had not been treated seriously by the authorities.

Magician wins America’s Got Talent: Champions

LOS ANGELES • Magician Shin Lim has played the right cards yet again, casting a spell on Monday to be crowned winner of the inaugural America’s Got Talent: The Champions contest.

The 27-year-old, who was born in Canada and raised in Singapore before his parents relocated to the United States, beat 11 contenders from similar talent contests worldwide, including British singer Susan Boyle.

“It’s crazy, to be honest. I still have to pinch myself. First winning AGT was crazy to me, but winning Champions was even more crazy. It’s very overwhelming and super exciting,” *People* magazine quoted Lim, who picked up US\$25,000 (S\$33,900), as saying.

“I don’t think I can call myself the champion of champions because I don’t really believe it. I mean, (contender) *Deadly Games* is throwing

knives and I’m just doing card tricks.”

Not all netizens were pleased that Lim, winner of season 13 of America’s Got Talent in September last year and who once again showcased his card tricks, edged out favourite Boyle – who did not even make the top five.

But Boyle, 57, took the loss in her stride. “Of course, I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t disappointed, but also deep down, I didn’t think I would win. Secretly, you hold out hope that you just might because that’s what drives you to do your best in a competition,” she told *People*.

“I’ve never really considered myself a champion, I’m just me, Susan Boyle.”

Meanwhile, Lim has another card up his sleeve to please his fans – an invitation card to his wedding in August to dancer Casey Thomas in Hawaii.



Magician Shin Lim with his fiancée, dancer Casey Thomas. The duo are getting married in August. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/CASEY THOMAS

In short

Ariana Grande tops Billboard again

Ariana Grande has scored her fourth career No. 1 album after *Thank U, Next* topped the Billboard chart this week. At No. 2 and No. 3 are movie soundtracks, with *A Star Is Born* ahead of *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

Actor Zhai Tianlin loses doctorate

First, Peking University’s management school expelled him. Now, the Beijing Film Academy has revoked the doctoral degree of Chinese actor Zhai Tianlin after he was found to have committed academic misconduct, it announced yesterday.

Jonas Brothers reunite, B.A.P. split

American rockers Jonas Brothers are planning a reunion after splitting up in 2013. The three siblings reportedly have met in London to iron out details, including calling their new venture just Jonas.

Over in K-pop, boyband B.A.P. are calling it a day after seven years, with the members not signing a fresh deal with their management firm.